The Modern Experience of the Religious

EDITED BY

NASSIM BRAVO AND JON STEWART

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The Modern Experience of the Religious

New Research in the History of Western Philosophy

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Introduction

The transition to modernity involved a myriad of transformations in the Western world. The end of the Middle Ages was marked by a series of milestones in the history of Europe. The expansion of a new Islamic power, the Ottoman Empire, and the conquest of Constantinople, put an end to the millenary institution that was the Roman Empire, one of the last links with the ancient world. In Iberia, the Christian kingdom of Castile concluded the process of the Reconquista, and now turned its gaze towards the Atlantic, thus initiating the era of exploration and also European imperialism and colonialism. In the Italian republics and principalities there began the cultural phenomenon that centuries later would be known as the Renaissance, with a humanist tendency that placed the human being at the center of artistic, philosophical, and political reflections. The development of a science based on experimentation and mathematical precision also took place. The overwhelming success of this new scientific method led to the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.

It could be argued that the Modern Age reached its apex with the Enlightenment. The fundamental principle of Enlightenment thought was to submit everything to the tribunal of human reason. This key notion was accompanied by the ideals of civil liberties, equality, the democratization of public life and progress, among many other things. The influence of enlightened modernity is usually associated with political, scientific, technological, and economic transformations. One immediately thinks of the French Revolution or the Industrial Revolution. However, one of the aspects of human life that was most shaken by the rigorous standards of the Enlightenment was religion.

For millennia, the backbone of religious beliefs and practices in the Western world was made up of revelation, dogmas, and rituals—elements that were confirmed and disseminated by tradition and ecclesiastical authority and accepted by the community of believers as a fact of life. But then the modern culture of the Enlightenment cast a shadow of doubt on this form of religiosity. Simple belief was viewed with suspicion as a symptom of that immature age of humanity which, according to Kant—one of the most eminent figures of the Enlightenment—had to be overcome. Faith, understood as the passive acceptance of a doctrinal content, did not pass the test of reason and, therefore, had to be questioned. Tradition as a form of transmission of knowledge was rejected since it was considered an obstacle to the progress of humanity. The secularization of public life became a desired goal, and, in the most radical cases, members of the institutionalized clergy were viewed with hostility as conservative agents of the *ancien régime*.

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Naturally, this did not mean that believers—who represented a vast majority in the Western world—suddenly abandoned their faith and religious practices. However, modern Enlightenment culture did require religious (and non-religious) communities to take a stand in the face of such objections. One could agree or disagree with the Enlightenment thinkers and principles, but it was necessary to have some kind of response. How does one live and experience religion in the context of such a cultural revolution?

Those sympathetic to the demands of the Enlightenment sought to make their religion compatible with the ideals of enlightened rationalism, arguing that most of its religious tenets, such as the existence of God or the immortality of the soul, essentially harmonized with the standards of human rationality, and to this end they developed a natural theology. Others suggested that what was really important in religion was not its doctrinal dogmas, which seemed to depend on a supernatural revelation incompatible with reason, but its moral or ethical value. Thus, for example, Jesus was interpreted more as an ethical role model than as the incarnation of a transcendent God. More moderate voices admitted that the principles of faith indeed come from a supernatural revelation, but they also pointed out that this revelation should be interpreted according to scientific and rational criteria by professional theologians.

Finally, there were the extreme positions, which regarded reason and religion as mutually exclusive. On the one hand, there were those who unconditionally rejected the Enlightenment principles, asserting that the excesses of reason alienate human beings from God. To kindle faith, they suggested, it is necessary to extinguish the light of reason. On the other hand, there were those who thought that religion and its practices were incompatible with the new modern order. At best, religion was seen as an antiquated relic of a remote past; at worst, it was denounced as an element harmful to culture and society.

In addition to these positions, modernity raised a number of questions the answers to which are still of enormous importance for our contemporary culture. What should be the role of religion in a secular or pluralistic society? In this modern context, how does the human being relate to God, if this is even possible? Can institutional religion be compatible with the new concerns of modernity, such as civil liberties, pluralism or, more recently, environmentalism? Is religiosity an essential part of human nature and its cultural world?

The present volume is devoted to exploring the different ways in which religious experience is lived in the context of the Modern Age. The authors contribute from their specific areas of expertise to explore in detail some of the approaches and positions that religious life has adopted to respond to the challenges presented by modernity.

The volume is divided into four thematic sections, each focusing on different fields in which it is possible to examine the experience of the religious in modernity. The first section is dedicated to the theological approach. The opening article of the book, written by Lee C. Barrett, analyzes the different theological positions in Christianity which attempted to respond to the criticisms directed by Enlightenment thought at religious practices. It begins with those who tried to convert Christianity into a rational religion acceptable by Enlightenment standards. It then describes the more moderate position which sought to retain the most important confessional elements of Christianity, but adapting them to the criteria of reason. It was argued that the basic tenets of revelation could not be contrary to logic and reason. Some of these theologians emphasized the predominantly moral character of Christianity. The article concludes by examining the more conservative theological reaction which, following the line established by Romanticism, turned its back on the rational demands of the Enlightenment in order to adopt a relationship with the divine founded on subjectivity.

Nassim Bravo describes the process by which the Danish theologian N.F.S. Grundtvig achieved his so-called "matchless discovery," namely, the conviction that the truth of Christianity is transmitted through the living word, i.e., the acceptance of the Apostles' Creed through baptism. The paper begins by giving a panoramic picture of the theological context of Denmark during the Danish Golden Age. In the second part, the author discusses the dominant theological view in the Danish Church: the theological rationalism represented by Henrik Nicolai Clausen. This is followed by an overview of the evolution of Grundtvig's theological thought. This provides the framework for the central part of the article, which examines Grundtvig's ecclesiological proposal in his polemical text "The Church's Rejoinder."

In her contribution to the volume, Fernanda Rojas argues that modern and postmodern individualism have been an essential element in the development of the evangelical churches. The first part of the article examines the roots of evangelicalism through the theological proposals of the three great reformers: Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. Then, in the second part, she explores the historical development of the religious revivalist movements in the two Great Awakenings that took place in the United States. Finally, the author attempts to demonstrate that individualism, understood in a modern and postmodern sense, is at the core of the religious practices of the evangelical churches from their origin to the present day.

The second section of the volume examines the modern religious experience from the perspective of the philosophy of religion. In the first article of the section, Kristína Bosáková analyzes the concept of common sense

(*sensus communis*) as a way to approach the religious tradition in the context of modernity from the Enlightenment to the present day. To this end, the article examines the thought of four modern philosophers: Mendelssohn, Feuerbach, Gadamer, and Habermas. For Bosáková, these four thinkers are united by their rejection of metaphysical speculation and their effort to understand the religious phenomenon through common sense.

Eduardo Charpenel's article, "History and Facticity in Kant's Philosophy of Religion," offers an analysis of Immanuel Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. While Kant's religious view is usually interpreted as an attempt to secularize Christianity, reducing it to the realm of morality, Charpenel argues that, in fact, this philosophy of religion is constantly in dialogue with the supernatural and transcendent principles of Christianity.

In his paper, Anton Vydra explores the question of the extent to which imagination determines human spirituality. To achieve this, he treats the case of the figure of the angel in the religious views of the Neoplatonic thinker John Scottus Eriugena, in particular in his work *Periphyseon*. Vydra argues that Eriugena's understanding of angels shows how much spirituality is the daughter of his imagination, and how this imagination has influenced the spiritual life of his later readers. The article concludes that our spirituality could be understood as a sign of the level of the cultivation of our imagination.

In the last article of the section on philosophy of religion, Luis Xavier López-Farjeat presents a broad overview of the different theological and philosophical approaches to the knowledge and experience of God in the context of the classical period of Islam. In the first part of the article, he analyzes the *kalām* approach of the theologians (*mutakallimūn*), who tried to examine in a critical and rational manner aspects of the Islamic religious doctrine such as the creation of the world, the divine attributes or free will. The author then discusses the approach of philosophy (*falsafa*). Influenced by Greek thought, the main aim of the new generation of Islamic philosophers was to understand reality through reason, although they also discussed religious questions such as the existence and nature of God. Finally, the third part of the article explores the Sufi approach. Sufi doctrine promoted intuitive knowledge of God through asceticism, spiritual practices and mysticism. With this work, the author shows how in a sense Islamic classical culture anticipated the various ways of thinking and relating to God that are characteristic of the modern Western world.

The field of philosophical anthropology is the subject of the third section of the volume. Gustavo Esparza examines the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer and his concept of divinity. The article argues that it is possible to trace the logical foundations of Cassirer's idea of God in three modern sources: Descartes,

Leibniz and Cohen. The "religious view" of these thinkers will constitute a decisive influence on Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.

Jaroslava Vydrová discusses in her article the role of religion in Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology. Vydrová suggests that religion constitutes not just another facet within culture, but a necessary element for the vulnerable and contingent condition of the human being, according to Plessner's anthropological approach. The article shows that Helmuth Plessner's conception of religion represents something neither metaphysical nor reductive but a unique contribution to the question of God in the field of philosophical anthropology.

In his article "Philosophy and Religion: Contested Consanguinity," František Novosád presents an interesting overview of the role of myth and religion in the context of the development of human culture. According to the author, myth constitutes the primitive attempt, within the margin of a specific community, to understand the world as a totality and to determine the role of the human being in that totality. It is argued that religion arises from the appropriation of the mythical worldview. However, whereas myth tends toward polytheism and cultural specificity, religion is monotheistic and systematic, i.e., it aspires to universality. Finally, Novosád reflects on the kinship and rivalry between religion and philosophy, especially after the Enlightenment.

The fourth section of the volume includes articles that discuss the role of religious practice in the context of politics and the social sciences. In the first article of the section, Jon Stewart offers a reading of *The Anti-Christ* in which he tries to show that Nietzsche developed his critique of Christianity in dialogue with various figures of the Hegelian tradition. Stewart further suggests that Nietzsche presents in this book a theory of alienation, a concept usually associated with thinkers such as Feuerbach or Marx. Christianity, Nietzsche argues in *The Anti-Christ*, has exerted a pernicious influence on modern European culture by undermining the positive values of antiquity and introducing into the world the concept of sin, a contempt for the body, and the notion that all human beings are equal before God. Nietzsche considers all this to constitute a form of alienation and even nihilism, for it alienates and strips human beings of their true nature.

In his contribution to the volume, Daniel Conway reflects on the essence of the religious in the third part of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*. While Nietzsche bluntly denounces the harmful influence of European Christianity on culture—what he calls "religious neurosis"—especially in the context of modernity, he also surprisingly claims that religion can play a positive role in society. For Nietzsche, this can only happen if religion returns to its original subordinate position as a tool of discipline and control.

Peter Šajda's article traces the history of the translations of Kierkegaard's work in both the Western world and the communist nations. Šajda's study shows the connection between the systematically atheistic policy of the communist block and the disruption of the translation tradition of Kierkegaard's works, which were viewed with suspicion. Only when the Soviet Union collapsed, did the translation work resume. The case analyzed in this article is intended to demonstrate the impact that political ideology can have on the development and dissemination of religious ideas.

Alžbeta Kuchtová reflects on the concept of alterity in the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and, specifically, the possibility of recognizing the alterity of nature and, consequently, the possibility of an environmental ethics. With this in mind, Kuchtová argues that the notion that the human being has been created in the image of God—an idea present in Levinas' late works—hinders the recognition of alterity in nature, as it assumes the superiority of the human over the natural. In other words, the article suggests that the hierarchy implicit in a religious view such as that of Levinas is incompatible with the principles of deep ecology.

The articles in the present collective volume show the great variety and richness with which religious life has developed in the complex context of modernity. Many of the issues concerning the modern experience of religion discussed here bear a striking resemblance to those of our own day. One might argue that we are living still in the Modern Age, as many of the elements introduced by Enlightenment still stand today. As long as this is the case, the reflection on the role of religion in this context will remain relevant.

Nassim Bravo, Aguascalientes, Mexico
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2022

PART 1

Theology

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CHAPTER 1

The Enlightenment and Its Aftermath as a Theological Watershed: Appropriations, Resistances, and Adaptations

Lee C. Barrett

Abstract

The Enlightenment promoted an intensified use of critical reason to question traditional religious authorities, hoping to purge faith of superstition, implausibility, intolerance, and mystification. Theologians responded to this challenge in a variety of ways. The most radical embraced the Enlightenment's critique of inherited beliefs and sought to reduce Christianity to a religion compatible with reason. Others attempted to synthesize Enlightenment sensibilities with traditional teachings by modifying crucial doctrines without jettisoning them. Others rejected some of the widespread Enlightenment philosophical presuppositions and developed alternative speculative systems to reinterpret Christianity. More conservative theologians attempted to resist the Enlightenment critique by appropriating the Enlightenment's own tools, using inductive argumentation to defend the faith. Others rejected the foundational reliance upon reason and sought to reestablish theology on a new basis, often on an analysis of human subjectivity and religious experience. All of these responses generated issues and trajectories that would dominate theology for the next two centuries and beyond.

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The Enlightenment was one of the most seismic phenomena in the history of Western Christianity, leaving indelible imprints on all subsequent theological movements. The monumental shift in cultural sensibilities was no monolithic ideological movement but was a complex congeries of interacting tendencies.[1] Consequently, its effects were wildly various. The power of the Enlightenment's diverse tendencies would be felt in different ways in different decades in different regions, with the United States experiencing their full force well into the nineteenth century. In spite of the differences, all of these often divergent

1 Ritchie Robertson, *The Enlightenment: The Pursuit of Happiness*, New York: Harper 2021, pp. 1–41.

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strands did share at least one common feature: an enhanced appreciation of critical reflection as the antidote to the unquestioned hegemony of inherited traditions.[2] Because this valorization of critical rationality challenged many basic tenets of the Christian tradition, Christian thinkers could not ignore it. Their multiple reactions continue to set the basic agenda for theology in the twenty-first century.

In many ways, the reliance upon human reason in theology was by no means new. Ever since the spread of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world, reason had been used as a hermeneutic lens to interpret sacred texts, as a device to clarify and organize theological convictions, and as an apologetic tool to render the faith plausible and attractive. For example, in the late seventeenth century Edward Stillingfleet, the devout Anglican Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, insisted that reason was absolutely necessary for both the interpretation and validation of scripture.[3] However, the Enlightenment ushered in an intensified enthusiasm for the critical use of reason. Many authors increasingly employed reason to purge the faith of superstition, implausibility, intolerance, and mystification. Although Enlightenment thinkers usually did not claim that reason was the sole foundation of theological truth, they did agree that theological propositions had to establish their credentials before the tribunal of critical rationality.

Theologians responded to this challenge in a variety of ways.[4] The most radical embraced the Enlightenment's critique of inherited beliefs and sought to purify Christianity from the contamination of its egregiously supernatural elements, reducing it to a religion compatible with reason. Some authors in this category sought to ground Christian beliefs in the moral dimensions of human life. Others attempted to combine Enlightenment sensibilities with traditional teachings by modifying doctrines without jettisoning them. Others rejected some of the widespread Enlightenment philosophical presuppositions and developed alternative speculative systems to reinterpret Christianity. More conservative theologians attempted to resist the Enlightenment critique by appropriating the Enlightenment's own tools, using reason itself to defend the faith, often through appeals to allegedly empirical evidence and inductive argumentation. Others rejected the foundational reliance upon reason and sought to reestablish theology on a new basis, often on an analysis of human subjectivity

2 See Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vols. 1–2, New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1966–69.

3 Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae, Or, A Rational Account of the Grounds of Christian Faith, as to the Truth and Divine Authority of the Scriptures,* London: Henry Mortlock 1666.

4 See Jon Stewart's overview, "The Enlightenment's Criticism of Religion: Theology," in his *An Introduction to Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Issue of Religious Content in the Enlightenment and Romanticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2022, pp. 22–48.

and religious experience. All of these responses generated issues and trajectories that would dominate theology for the next two centuries and beyond.

1 The Acceptance of the Enlightenment's Valorization of Critique

Some Christian thinkers embraced the skepticism about religious traditions that had been encouraged by the more heterodox and secular-minded Enlightenment thinkers, while trying to salvage a minimalistic, generic theism. The radical Deists of Britain and the *philosophes* of France questioned the credibility of any "positive" religion based exclusively on the dubious assertions of an historical revelation. In their eyes, the lack of corroborating logical arguments or empirical evidence rendered many of Christianity's claims to truth questionable, and sometimes ludicrous.

As an alternative to subservience to inherited doctrines, many Deists and *philosophes* appealed to reason's allegedly indubitable dictates to ground a more "natural religion." In the seventeenth century philosophers like Spinoza had already argued that reason was the ultimate authority to which putative supernatural sources of knowledge must submit for validation.[5] Subsequent thinkers like John Toland and Matthew Tindal in England proposed that Christian revelation was nothing more than a republication of the religious truths discoverable by reason. According to Toland, there could be nothing in special revelation that was either contrary to reason or above it.[6] In his eyes Christian theology's legitimate content could be reduced without remainder to the religion of nature. Tindal proclaimed that a universally beneficent God would not restrict the communication of saving truths to the recipients of a special revelation.[7] Some of the more radical thinkers admitted that this sufficiency of rational religion made Christianity totally redundant. Anthony Collins, a self-described freethinker, went so far as to propose that the Bible should not be regarded as a source of religious truth.[8] Thomas Paine, a fiery provocateur of the American Revolution, delighted in exposing the immorality of many of the biblical stories and the canon's myriad self-contradictions.[9]

5 See Richard H. Popkin, "Spinoza and Biblical Scholarship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. by Don Garrett, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 383.

6 John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, London: Sam. Buckley 1696.

7 Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation*, London: unknown publisher 1730.

8 Anthony Collins, *Discourse on the Grounds and Reason of the Christian Religion*, London: unknown publisher 1724.

9 Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, ed. by Philip Foner, Secaucus, NJ: Citadel 1974, pp. 55–84.

"Reason" for the Enlighteners was a slippery concept and could assume different forms, both speculative and empirical. On the one hand, the followers of rationalists like Leibniz sought certainty through deductive reasoning from first principles, a method that Christian Wolff declared to be ideal.[10] As an example of this, Samuel Clarke argued that the infinitude of space and time required the existence of an infinite self-subsistent substance.[11] On the other hand, empiricists in the tradition of John Locke sought certitude through inductive generalizations from experiential data, and enthusiastically extended this method to theological matters. But no matter how much they differed, both rationalism and empiricism took the conclusions of rational reflection to be more reliable than the church's claims to absolute truth.

One aspect of this reliance upon critical reason was the undermining of the authority of traditional doctrines by historical investigation. Textual scholars, analyzing and comparing the earliest available manuscripts, suspected that many venerable ecclesial teachings were not clearly suggested by the Bible and had not been always believed by the church. For example, in the late seventeenth century a spate of critical histories of the Apostles' Creed appeared.[12] Most of these works had compared the citations of creedal formulae in ancient Christian authors in order to expose discrepancies and later additions. The critical scholars concluded that the Creed did not issue from the apostles themselves and did not receive its final form until the fourth or fifth century. In the eyes of many, the questioning of literal apostolic authorship diminished the authority of the Creed. By the nineteenth century even very orthodox Reformed theologians proposed that the fourth or fifth century origins of the written Creed argued against its apostolicity and therefore against any ascription of absolute authority to it.[13]

Even more damagingly, historical criticism also eroded trust in the Bible. The rise of the comparative study of ancient languages raised doubts about traditional translations of key biblical passages and concepts. Moreover, the recognition of stylistic divergences even within individual books led to the identification of different literary strands in the canon as a whole by Eichhorn[14]

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10 See Annette Aubert, *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, p. 254.

11 Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, London: James Knapton 1705, p. 229.

12 See Joseph Bingham, *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, London: Robert Knaplock 1719.

13 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vols. 1–3, New York: Scribners 1873, vol. 1, pp. 104–116.

14 Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Einleitung ins Alte Testament*, Leipzig: Weidmanns, Erben, und Reich 1780–83.

and Semler[15] and the consequent positing of diverse pre-textual traditions. Johann Gottfried von Herder drew attention to the mythic and poetic aspects of Scripture, seeing them as expressions of different ancient cultures.[16] Comparing biblical material to other ancient texts suggested that the stories were not entirely unique. The perception of different stages of the development in the canon raised the possibility that it was the product of the evolution of the cultural sensibilities of Hebrew religious culture. This detection of historical development in the canon militated against the notions of the unicity of the Bible, the perspicacity of its contents, and its plenary divine authorship. In the nineteenth century this trajectory would blossom in the radical Biblical investigations of scholars like David Friedrich Strauss, whose historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus destabilized traditional understandings of Jesus as the incarnation of God.[17]

Attempted demonstrations of the Bible's reliability and authority began to falter. Anthony Collins ferociously attacked the argument that the truth of the Bible was demonstrated by the fulfillment of its prophecies.[18] For example, it had been claimed that Old Testament predictions of a future savior had come to pass in the life of Jesus. Such alleged proofs from the fulfillment of prophecy were rendered dubious by the suggestion that the prophetic texts postdated the predicted events, or that the later stories had been crafted to fit the earlier predictions. The evidence of miracles became less compelling as trust in the regularity of natural laws problematized belief in supernatural interventions. As Diderot asserted, no report of a violation of the natural laws, no matter how well attested, could have any probative power.[19] Similarly, David Hume argued that it is self-defeating to appeal to the experience of a miraculous event in order to prove something that is contrary to all experience.

The general suspicion of traditional authorities fed an intense distrust of ecclesial magisteria. Many Deists famously denounced "priest-craft," railed against the guiles of the clergy who sought to manipulate the credulous masses, and cautioned rational individuals to be wary of the superstitions embedded in the traditions of the church. Charles Blount asserted that all claims to a special

15 Johann Salomo Semler, *Johann Salomo Semler's Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon*, vols. 1–4, Halle: Hemmerde 1771–75.

16 Johann Gottfried Herder, *Von Gottes Sohn, der Welt Heiland. Nach Johannes Evangelium*, in *Herder's Sämmtliche Werke*, vols. 1–33, ed. by Berhard Suphan, Berlin: Weidmann 1877–1913, vol. 19 (1880).

17 David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. by George Eliot, vols. 1–3, London: Chapman Brothers 1846.

18 See Collins, *Discourse on the Grounds and Reason of the Christian Religion*.

19 See Gay, *The Enlightenment*, p. 146.

revelation were motivated by the economic self-interest of the clergy and their hunger for social power.[20] Voltaire's misgivings about the clergy erupted in his famous cry, "Écrasez l'infâme."[21] Deists often denounced a host of orthodox doctrines as prime examples of ecclesial mystification and conceptual unintelligibility. Formulations of the Trinity, the presence of Christ in the sacraments, and the atonement were paraded as prime examples of ecclesial obfuscation.[22]

Moreover, confessional disagreements were particularly odious to Enlightenment enthusiasts. The conflicting confessional truth-claims spawned by the Reformation had fractured the religious landscape, so that no single religious tradition could claim immediately obvious validity or plausibility. The resultant theological pluralism had undermined any automatic ascription of authority to any particular historic religious institution and its normative documents, and made religious conflict almost inevitable. Horrified by the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many intellectuals concluded that the passion for doctrinal precision provoked needless dissentions within and between nations. In the eyes of the enlightened, political tranquility would become more achievable if Christians would simply reduce their convictions to a minimalist "reasonable" core and would practice toleration free of confessional dogmatism. The reliance upon reason should uncover the essentials of Christianity upon which all right-thinking people could agree.[23]

This sensibility was reinforced by an augmented confidence in the rational abilities of all individuals. The spirit of critical rationality reached its premier expression in Immanuel Kant's exhortation "Have courage to use your *own* understanding!"[24] The conviction spread that in matters of religious knowledge truth cannot be acquired at second-hand through the testimony of third-parties, not even through the witness of the venerable saints of the church. Conviction should be personal, sincere, and free of external pressure to conform.

In many regions and sectors of society confidence grew in the abilities of ordinary people to think for themselves and to make their own political decisions. This valorization of the cognitive and volitional powers of ordinary,

20 Charles Blount, *Summary Account of the Deists Religion*, unknown publisher 1686.

21 See Theodore Besterman, *Voltaire*, 3rd ed., Oxford: Blackwell 1976.

22 See Voltaire, *Treatise on Tolerance and Other Writings*, trans. by Brian Masters and Simon Harvey, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000.

23 John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. by John Higgins-Biddle, Oxford: Clarendon 2000.

24 Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?'" in *Political Writings*, ed. by Hans Reiss, trans. by H. B. Nisbet, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 54.

unlearned people spilled over into a conviction that laypeople can and should discern the meaning of Scripture for themselves. The era of the American and French revolutionary wars witnessed an upsurge in egalitarianism, and its consequent distrust of hierarchies and elites, including spiritual ones that based their authority on antiquated traditions.[25] In the nascent United States, the older European habit of deference to authoritative institutions waned as individual initiative and self-reliance were lionized. The right of private judgment in theological matters seemed to be the natural analogue of the right of private judgment in political matters.

To amplify their critique, the Enlightenment-style rationalists frequently claimed that the esoteric doctrines of Christianity play no useful role in moral or religious practice. Enlightenment thinkers tended to regard a rational, natural morality as the most certain core of religiosity, and therefore evaluated religions in terms of their moral consequences. Matthew Tindal proclaimed that the worth of any revealed religion resided in its ability to reinforce the moral laws known to reason.[26] Consequently, Christ was frequently portrayed not as a savior from sin, but as a moral teacher and an exemplar of virtue. Sin was redescribed as the fruit of ignorance and faulty socialization, rather than an intentional violation of divine commands. For example, in Denmark Baron Frederik Christian Wedel-Jarlsberg popularized critiques of dogmatic theology and the institutional church, and argued for the reduction of Christianity to moral and civic principles.[27] In the United States, President Thomas Jefferson produced an abridged version of the New Testament from which all morally objectionable parts had been purged so that the sublime and rational ethics of Jesus could emerge without distortion.[28]

2 The Moderate Appropriation of the Enlightenment

Theologians who sought to remain faithful to the dominant confessional traditions adapted to these Enlightenment critiques of religion in various ways. A popular strategy was to regard reason as providing the foundation of the faith, while revelation furnished the superstructure. For theologians like Michael

25 See Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1989.

26 See Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation*.

27 Frederik Christian Wedel-Jarlsberg, *Den geistlige Stand bør afskaffes*, Copenhagen: Christian Frederik Holm 1795.

28 Thomas Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible*, Radford, VA: Wilder Publishing 2007.

Baumgarten, Jakob Carpov, and John Tillotson, reason could discover many essential truths, such as the existence of God and moral duties, but revelation made available a set of truths that were above reason, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation.[29] But even for these moderate thinkers, revelation could not in any way contradict reason. They valued reason as a critical tool to weed out irrational doctrines and as a hermeneutic aid to clarify the true import of the salvageable beliefs. For example, the mildly rationalistic Karl Bretschneider questioned the authority of traditional doctrines that could not meet reason's criteria of intelligibility and plausibility, but accepted those that could pass the test, even if they could not be discovered by reason alone.[30] Sometimes this two-storied understanding of reason and revelation was promoted by ecclesial authorities to instruct a popular audience. In Denmark Nicolai Balle composed an influential catechism that purged dogmatics of ecclesial obfuscations and interpreted the Christian life through the lens of rational moral principles.[31]

Such champions of a chastened orthodoxy embraced historical criticism of the sacred texts in order to recover their original meaning and authenticity. The influential German biblical scholar Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette used historical criticism of the Bible to reveal the unique and diverse perspectives of the various sources that informed New Testament books, and utilized that discovery to reform inherited Lutheran assumptions about the centrality of the theme of justification by grace.[32] Such biblical scholars believed that the recovery of the Bible's original meaning through situating texts in their historical contexts would militate against the proliferation of warring ecclesial interpretations, undercut confessional differences, and promote the unity of Christendom. In that vein, the mildly rationalistic Johann Lorenz von Mosheim's tomes on church history narrated a tale of the church's fall from apostolic integrity and unity, with a common understanding of the Bible, to a period of superstition and denominational fragmentation.[33] Far from undermining the spiritual power of the Bible, he hoped, historical research could

29 See Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vols. 1–2, New Haven, Yale University Press 1972, vol. 1, p. 36.

30 Karl Bretschneider, *Handbuch der Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirke*, vols. 1–2, 3rd ed., Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth 1828.

31 Nicolai Edinger Balle, *Lærebog i den Evangelisk-christelige Religion*, Copenhagen: Jens Hostrup Schultz 1824.

32 Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, *Dogmatik der protestantischen Kirche*, vols. 1–2, Berlin: Reimer 1840.

33 Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History: Ancient and Modern, from the Birth of Christ to the Beginnings of the Present Century*, trans. by Archibald Maclaine, London: Cadell 1790.

unearth the singular objective meaning of the scriptural texts and thereby reunite the divergent confessional traditions.

Besides attempting to recover the plain, rational meaning of the Bible, theologians who were mildly sympathetic to Enlightenment themes often used the tools of the Enlightenment itself to justify Christian core beliefs. This strategy was most obvious in the enthusiasm for discovering ostensibly empirical evidence for the truth of revelation. The apologetic strategy known as "natural theology" turned to the argument from the design of the universe to prove the existence, wisdom, and benevolence of God. The naturalist John Ray appealed to empirical observation to argue that the harmony of the planetary orbits, the suitability of the organs of animals for their survival, and the complexity of the human body could not have happened by chance.[34] Even David Hume's skeptical attacks on such arguments did little to diminish their popularity. The influence of the argument from design reached its zenith in the work of William Paley, who popularized the analogy that just as the intricacy and purposefulness of a watch points to the intentionality of a watchmaker, so also does the intricacy and purposefulness of the cosmos point to the existence of a cosmic Designer.[35]

Some critically orthodox thinkers concentrated more on the attempt to salvage Christian doctrines by reinterpreting them in the light of the ethical life, without reducing them to ethical precepts. By the late eighteenth century many were influenced by the moral focus and metaphysical restraint of Immanuel Kant.[36] Kant had radicalized the Enlightenment's epistemic caution by employing reason to critique its own metaphysical pretensions. Kant's restrictions on the legitimate range of pure reason prohibited speculation about all transcendent matters, including God *in se*. Kant rejected the standard proofs for the existence of God, including the argument from design. For Kant, the concept of God was only meaningful in the domain of practical reason, in the pursuit of the moral life. God and immortality could be justified as postulates of practical reason, for the moral life required belief in a divine power, the immortality of the soul, and the future coordination of righteousness and happiness. Given this moral orientation, Christ was to be understood as an

34 John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*, London: William Innys 1714.

35 William Paley, *Natural Theology*, London: R. Faulder 1802.

36 See Ronald Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1992. Stewart, "Kant: The Limits of Reason and the Moral Foundation of Religion," in his *An Introduction to Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Issue of Religious Content in the Enlightenment and Romanticism*, pp. 62–72.

archetype of virtue.[37] Kant reinterpreted the doctrine of the Fall and origin sin as a pictorial depiction of radical evil, the failure to make the categorical imperative one's highest maxim. Consequently, Kant devalued all doctrines that were unnecessary for the pursuit of the moral life. Far from being comprehensible in terms of pure reason, many confessional formulae could not even be defended as postulates of practical reason. The centrality of the moral life for theological reflection, and the use of ethical convictions to critique the antiquated dimensions of the Bible, would continue even though the influence of Kant declined. In the late nineteenth century, this impulse would inform the influential school of Albrecht Ritschl and live on in the legacy of modern Protestant liberalism. Adding a more affective and poetic dimension, this sensibility would find overt expression in Matthew Arnold's celebrated claim that religion is "ethics heightened, enkindled, lit up by feeling."[38]

For many of these moderates, the doctrine of total depravity was particularly odious, even among theologians who were orthodox Calvinists in other respects. In the nascent United States the "New Divinity" of Samuel Hopkins defended the principle that God cannot hold people culpable for failing to do something that they are not even theoretically capable of doing.[39] Therefore, if God morally evaluates people according to whether they respond to God's revelation in Scripture or not, people, including the unlearned, must be capable of understanding that revelation. The cognitive capacities of sinners must remain functional, rather than being totally debilitated by original sin.

This desire to preserve some semblance of individual responsibility would spread in almost every Protestant tradition, and even flourish in Calvinist circles. In the Netherlands, Arminianism, the belief that even sinners are free to accept or reject God's grace, challenged the doctrine authorized by the Synod of Dort of 1619 that God's action is irresistible. In England John Taylor railed against the Calvinist doctrine that human beings apart from grace had no ability to respond freely to God's offer of salvation.[40] By the early eighteenth century the conviction that any response to God must be voluntary had become the majority view among Anglican clergy. This desire to preserve responsible freedom became so widespread that it informed the theologies of such diverse figures as John Wesley, the progenitor of Methodism, and William Ellery

37 Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. by Theodore Greene and Hoyt Hudson, New York: Harper & Row 1960.

38 Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, New York: Macmillan 1873, p. 21.

39 Samuel Hopkins, *Two Discourses*, Boston: M'Alpine 1768.

40 John Taylor, *Scriptural Doctrine of Original Sin, Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*, London: J. Wilson 1740.

Channing, the founder of American Unitarianism. Wesley, who valued the authority of reason, espoused the moderate view that God's first work of grace is to restore the freedom to respond to God that had been damaged by sin.[41]

3 The Conservative Reaction to the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment also catalyzed a fierce conservative rejection of its basic dynamics among many strands of theology. Typically, the foes of the Enlightenment appealed either to the Bible as being historically accurate or to the confessional and liturgical traditions of their own churches. But in order to justify that appeal and to legitimate their interpretations of Scripture and tradition, they frequently made use of tools provided by the Enlightenment itself.

Some theologians insisted that both the meaning and the truth of the Bible were clear to reasonable individuals. This was an intensification of the Protestant commitment to the principle of the priesthood of all believers, including the imperative that all Christians should read Scripture for themselves, in conjunction with an augmented trust in the perspicuity of Scripture. Moreover, even in many Calvinist circles the conviction had spread that a benevolent deity would necessarily have provided humanity with a clear, unambiguous revelation.[42] Moreover, God must ensure that the salvific essentials of God's revelation in Scripture, in principle at least, are comprehensible to all people. If divine revelation is the communication of saving information, then that information cannot be so cryptic as to frustrate an ordinary individual's interpretive abilities. Along with many Enlightenment thinkers they assumed that faith begins as a cognitive matter, as assent to the demonstrable facts. In the English-speaking world they often relied upon the Scottish Common Sense philosophers to justify the claim that the biblical revelation resonates with the innate assumptions of reflective thought.[43]

However, it was recognized that the truths of the Bible were presented in Scripture in a jumbled, unsystematic fashion, embedded in psalms, narratives, snippets of wisdom, and letters. To form a coherent worldview, these scattered bits of supernatural information had to be organized. Many of these biblicists

41 See Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, London: Epworth Press 1989.

42 Samuel Hopkins, *System of Doctrines*, vols. 1–2, Boston: I. Thomas and E. Andres 1793, vol. 1, pp. 84–88.

43 See Linden DeBie, *Speculative Theology and Common-Sense Religion*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick 2008, pp. 1–30.

practiced an inductive hermeneutics, reaching doctrinal conclusions by collating disparate biblical passages, extrapolating the relevant data, and organizing it.[44] They believed that they were employing the tools of Baconian science, for they were treating biblical passages in the way that geologists treat rocks, collecting them, grouping them, and drawing general conclusions. This approach to theology would become dominant in the work of Charles Hodge of Princeton Seminary and would be a factor in the rise of biblical fundamentalism in America.[45] In Germany, Ernst Hengstenberg similarly insisted that reason, which is distorted by sin, must remain subordinate to the truths revealed in the inerrant Bible.[46]

In addition to the Bible, the confessional traditions of the various churches promised to provide solid ground from which Enlightenment skepticism could be resisted. Sometimes this confessionalism was a reaction against regional political and cultural dynamics. For example, in the German states, most notably Prussia, the various governmental attempts to create a union of the Lutheran and Reformed churches triggered a reaction from stalwart Lutheran factions who insisted upon preserving their own unique doctrinal heritage and theological ethos.[47] They therefore looked to the confessional documents of Lutheranism to reinforce their specific identity. In Denmark, the "old orthodox" party associated with Andreas Rudelbach trumpeted the normative status of the Lutheran confessions in order to defend orthodox doctrines from the apparently heterodox tendencies of modernity.[48]

Other conservative theologians looked to the creeds of the early church, particularly the Apostles' Creed, to ground a capacious ecumenical hope.[49] In Prussia, the party of "*evangelische Katholizität*" (evangelical Catholicism) championed by Ludwig von Gerlach hoped to include Roman Catholics in its more ecumenical vision of the established church. The return to the early

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44 See Archibald Alexander, "The Sermon Delivered at the Inauguration," in *The Princeton Theology 1812–1891*, ed. by Mark Noll, Grand Rapids: Baker 1983, p. 80.

45 See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, pp. 151–188.

46 Ernst Hengstenberg, "Fragmente über den Gebrauch der Vernunft—das Reich der Finsternis—Schöpfung und den Sündenfall," *Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung*, vol. 33, 1825, pp. 257–78.

47 See Thomas Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006, pp. 212–323.

48 See Søren Jensen, "Andreas Gottlob Rudelbach: Kierkegaard's Idea of an *Orthodox* Theologian," in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome II, *Theology*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2009 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 7), pp. 303–333.

49 Eugen Jedele, *Die Kirchenpolitischen Anschauungen des Ernst Ludwig von Gerlach*, Ansbach: C. Brügel & Sohn 1910.

creeds jointly recognized by magisterial Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy would have the advantage of helping to unite the conservative monarchies of Europe, including Prussia, Austria, and Russia, against the destabilizing Enlightenment forces of liberalism and revolution.

Enthusiasm for the Apostles' Creed was widespread, and the notion of apostolic authorship continued to have its defenders throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in spite of historical critique. The Danish theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig had even argued that the words of the Apostles' Creed had been dictated by Jesus himself, and therefore the Creed possessed even greater authority than the gospels.[50] He insisted that the Bible should be interpreted through the lens of the church's creeds and liturgies, for the church was older than the Bible and logically more foundational. But after skeptical doubts had been raised, the procedures of historical investigation and argumentation had to be employed to ground the belief in apostolic (or divine) authorship.

Some confessional conservatives even borrowed from Romanticism and Hegel to combat modern doubts about the authority of the creedal heritage. In the United States, John Nevin and Philip Schaff proclaimed that the Apostles' Creed could not be improved upon as an affirmation of the core beliefs of Christian faith, but admitted that it was not the product of editorial meeting of the twelve apostles.[51] For them, the creed had assumed its current form through an organic evolution and dialectical tension. They embraced the decisive authority of critical research in any attempt to grasp the historic Christian faith, for God has been active in the life of the church, energizing and guiding its organic development. Once again, the legacy of the Enlightenment lived on in the very efforts to resist it.

4 Hegel's Rational Alternative to Enlightenment Reason

Other theologians and philosophers sought more drastic responses to the alleged shortcomings of the Enlightenment. Most significantly, the Enlightenment's ostensible dualisms of the perceived object and the perceiving subject and of God and humanity generated attempts to use reason itself to transcend these bifurcations without reverting to an uncritical orthodoxy. This project,

50 See Anders Holm, "Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig: The Matchless Giant," in *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*, Tome II, *Theology*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2009 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 7), pp. 95–152.

51 See Nevin, "The Apostles' Creed," pp. 23–98.

of course, required a reconceptualization of reason, and of logic itself. Enormously influential responses of this variety were attempted by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, F. W. J. Schelling, and G. W. F. Hegel, all of which would help shape a variety of theological traditions.

Perhaps the most influential effort to refurbish reason and put it to a theological use was the speculative idealism epitomized by Hegel. Hegel did accept the Enlightenment theme that the contents of the Christian faith must be comprehended by reason, and that the implicit conceptual content of doctrines must be given a more adequate form. He also absorbed the Enlightenment's desire for a comprehensive system that would display the interconnections among all phenomena and concepts. However, Hegel questioned the belief of most Enlightenment thinkers that a static and universal set of rational principles had always informed human consciousness, and that a fully developed pristine natural religion had originally been embedded in human consciousness. Rather, according to Hegel, modes of cognition and valuation, including theological articulations, assume different forms in different historical periods. Retrospectively, a developmental pattern can be discerned in the evolution of consciousness, as the human spirit struggles to generate more satisfying expressions in every dimension of life, including philosophy, art, religion, political systems, and all ideation. Although Hegel was not the reductive systematizer that he was often reputed to be, he often did discern a triadic movement in the evolution of "Spirit," proceeding from undifferentiated identity, through differentiation and alienation, to the synthesis of identity and difference, actualized in the concrete individual. For example, human maturation begins with the submergence of the individual in the customs and values of a homogenous society. In opposition to this, a sense of individual rights and uniqueness develops, shattering the unity of the traditional culture.[52] Then the specter of solipsism motivates a synthesis of the rights of individuals and the need for social cohesion. According to Hegel, this triadic dynamic is the articulation in a proper conceptual form of the more pictorial language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[53] Philosophy sets forth in a comprehensible manner the truths that religion expresses preconceptually.

Hegel developed a dynamic, developmental system that provided an alternative to the metaphysics of the Enlightenment. Regarding his own work as a

52 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977.

53 Ibid., p. 325, pp. 453–478. See also G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, *The Consummate Religion*, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson, Oxford: Clarendon Press 2008, pp. 77–85.

reconceptualization of theology, he used this developmental schema to reinterpret many traditional Christian doctrines. God was no longer viewed as the purely transcendent watchmaker, but rather as a teleological dynamic seeking to attain self-consciousness in the human spirit. In Hegel's works sin became the moment of negativity in the evolution of Spirit, the alienation of the individual from the other, including nature and society.[54] Christ, as described in the doctrine of the Incarnation, was construed as the enactment in history and the symbol of the general teleological unity of the divine and human.[55] Salvation was described as the recognition and affirmation of the necessary historical travails of the evolution of Spirit as it moved from alienation to reconciliation. The suggestion of necessity in this evolution shifted the theological center of gravity away from the sense of individual responsibility that had been so crucial to the older orthodoxy and to most of the moralists of the Enlightenment.

The exact meaning of Hegel's treatment of Christian concepts, particularly his language about God that could be interpreted as pantheistic, quickly became a controversial issue.[56] Some of his disciples, who became known as the Hegelian Right, enthusiastically adopted the principle that the doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of Christian theology, for it articulated the dialectical development of Spirit. This was a significant theological move, for it counteracted the prior tendency of Enlightenment moderates to construe the Trinity in terms of God's "economic" actions of creation, redemption, and completion, and signaled a return to interest in the "immanent" Trinity, the relations of the Trinitarian persons to one another. These "right-wing" appropriators of Hegel then argued that his work suggested that this developmental dynamic is rooted in God's inner being, logically prior to and apart from its enactment in the world. In this view, God was in some sense transcendent and could be said to exercise purposeful intentional agency. This view was promoted in northern Europe by Philip Marheineke,[57] and became common coin among the disparate group of thinkers who would become known as the

54 Hegel, *Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, pp. 90–108, pp. 207–210, pp. 290–309.

55 Ibid., pp. 109–132, pp. 211–222, pp. 310–27.

56 Cyril O'Regan, "The Trinity in Kant, Hegel, and Schelling," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. by Giles Emery, O.P., and Matthew Levering, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011, pp. 254–266. Stewart, "The Pantheism Debate or the Question of a Personal God," in his *An Introduction to Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Issue of Religious Content in the Enlightenment and Romanticism*, pp. 212–220.

57 Philipp K. Marheineke, *Lehrbuch des christlichen Glaubens und Lebens für denkende Christen*, 2nd ed., Berlin: Nicolai 1836.

"mediating theologians," such as Isaac Dorner.[58] In Denmark Hans Lassen Martensen recast Hegel's ruminations about Spirit in this more traditional guise, articulating a speculative understanding of God's being apart from the world.[59] He asserted that the Trinity is not just the necessary moments in God's life in which difference returns to unity, for God is free and self-conscious in the acts of creation and redemption. God, according to Martensen, was under no necessity to create the universe. This view spread across the Atlantic, where in the United States the Mercersburg theologians, John Nevin and Philip Schaff, espoused the Trinitarian emphasis of the Hegelian right.[60]

But according to some of his other admirers, Hegel was claiming that God is not fully real in abstraction, apart from the historical evolution of Spirit. Hegelian sympathizers like Bruno Bauer developed the theme that much of what is presented in the Bible as God's interventions in history is really mythic language appropriate for ancient cultures.[61] This would become evident in the Hegelian left in the work of figures, such as David Friedrich Strauss[62] and Ferdinand Christian Baur,[63] who claimed that a distinction had to be made between the idea of Christ as the symbol of the reconciliation that was implicit in the developmental process of Spirit, and the human person Jesus of Nazareth, who was an object of empirical historical research. This perspective was a modification of the Deists' skepticism about the church's historical claims and its suspicion of classical theism. This is particularly evident in the career of Ludwig Feuerbach, who began his academic life as a disciple of Hegel but proceeded to reverse Hegel's dialectic of the divine projecting itself into the human sphere and claimed that humanity projected the highest possibilities

58 See Aubert, *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology*, pp. 62–94.

59 Hans Lassen Martensen, *De autonomia conscientiæ sui humanæ in theologiam dogmaticum nostri temporis introducta*, Copenhagen: I. D. Quist 1837. See the English translation: *The Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness in Modern Dogmatic Theology*, in *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. by Curtis L. Thompson and David J. Kangas, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1997, pp. 73–147. See also Robert Leslie Horn, *Positivity and Dialectic: A Study of the Theological Method of Hans Lassen Martensen*, Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel 2007 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 2), pp. 44–55. Jon Stewart, *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark*, Tome 11, *The Martensen Period: 1837–1842*, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel 2007 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 3), pp. 95–117.

60 John Williamson Nevin, *Dr. Nevin's Theology: Based on Manuscript Class-Room Lectures*, ed. by William Harvey Erb, Reading, PA: I. M. Beaver 1913.

61 Bruno Bauer, *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptyker*, vols. 1–3, Leipzig: Otto Wigand 1841–42.

62 Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*.

63 Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Lehre von der Dreieinigheit und Menschwerdung Gottes in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, vols. 1–3, Tübingen: C. F. Osiander 1841.

of its own existence onto an imaginary transcendent object.[64] Alienation is overcome by recognizing that what humans call God is really the projection of their own values. In this way the purely immanent humanism of the radical Enlightenment, its valorization of the material world, and its anti-supernaturalism came to full fruition.

5 The Turn to Subjectivity as an Alternative to Enlightenment Reason

A very different theological alternative to the Enlightenment emerged in northern Europe in the closing years of the eighteenth century. Partly indebted to Pietism and partly to Romanticism, this theological strategy reacted against what was perceived as the excessive cognitivism of the Enlightenment and its alleged privileging of abstract reasoning over the immediacy of heartfelt experience. Rather than relying on inductive or deductive argumentation, these theologians sought to ground the faith in the more intuitive and affective dimensions of experience.

From Pietism this theological trajectory borrowed the strategy of using soteriological experience as the lens to interpret and justify all theological concepts. This more overtly self-reflexive approach to theology was exemplified by such late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theologians as Philipp Spener, August Francke, and Count Nicolas Zinzendorf. Although most Pietists nominally affirmed the whole gamut of Lutheran or Reformed doctrines, they focused their theological attention more intensively on doctrines that could be extrapolated directly from the experiences of sin and redemption. Reacting against the cognitive emphasis of both post-Reformation Protestant scholasticism and the Enlightenment, the Pietists insisted that theological assertions are only meaningful when they are embedded in the appropriate form of Christian subjectivity. In their devotional and academic writings, which were often indistinguishable, theology tended to become the description of the subjectivity of the redeemed sinner.

Romanticism also contributed mightily to this turn away from Enlightenment objectivities to Christian subjectivity. The Romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a polymorphous and diffuse movement, defying definition, and often exhibiting countervailing tendencies.

64 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. by George Eliot, New York: Harper & Row 1957. Jon Stewart, "Feuerbach's Doctrine of the Humanity of the Divine in *The Essence of Christianity*," in his *Hegel's Century: Alienation and Recognition in a Time of Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2021, pp. 89–117.

But in spite of important divergences, most Romantic authors were united by a common rebellion against the Enlightenment's ostensible dichotomies, including the alleged bifurcations of perceiving subject and perceived object, the individual and the community, spirit and nature, duty and inclination, and reason and emotion. Romantic thinkers tended to substitute organic metaphors for the mechanical imagery of the Enlightenment, intuition for detached analysis, and models of growth and flux over any schema of static, immutable laws.

The turn to organismic language and spiritual intuition had a profound influence on biblical interpretation and theology. Herder had proclaimed the necessity of looking beyond the historical meaning of biblical texts in order to discern their deeper spiritual sense.[65] Christians of the early nineteenth century influenced by Herder and the Romantics typically described the Christian religion as a life rather than as the cognizing of truths. For example, in regard to the Apostles' Creed, John Nevin announced that "The Creed was not *made*, not manufactured like a watch; it *grew*, self-produced…out of the great fact of Christianity itself. The early Church was not the artificer that hammered it into shape, part by part, and one article after another; but the organ, through whose life as an actual fact it brought itself to pass."[66]

The turn to subjectivity and vitalism in theology was attractive to some political and cultural movements during the early nineteenth century.[67] For example, the Prussian Union of Churches, the state-sponsored amalgamation of Reformed and Lutheran traditions promoted in 1817 by King Frederick Wilhelm III, reconstructed the established religion's doctrinal foundations. Those who sought to emphasize the commonalities of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions tended to base religious unity on pan-Protestant religious experience and thereby avoid divisive doctrinal differences. Enthusiasm for the identification of theology with the articulation of Christian experience was often motivated by a desire to foster a comprehensive national church untroubled by confessional tensions.

Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose influence on theology cannot be minimized, provided a foundation for this more experience-based theology. Schleiermacher synthesized the affective orientation of the Pietism in which he had

65 Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History*, ed. by Marcia Bunge, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2004.

66 John Williamson Nevin, *The Early Creeds*, ed. by Charles Yrigoyen and Lee C. Barrett, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2020, p. 69.

67 See Walter Conser, *Church and Confession: Conservative Theologians in Germany, England and America, 1815–1866*, Macon, GA: Mercer Press 1984, pp. 13–96.

been raised with the focus on subjectivity that was typical of the Romantics. He forged a new approach to Christian theology based on the premise that faith was not a matter of cognitive assent to propositions, as both Protestant orthodoxy and Enlightenment rationalism had assumed. According to Schleiermacher, much of Protestant scholasticism had claimed to know too much about God and had advanced doctrinal propositions that were not expositions of the believer's faith. Faith is not grounded in the alleged proofs of the truth of Christianity from miracles or the fulfillment of prophesy. Nor is faith to be identified with moral rectitude or the dutiful discharge of ethical obligations. For Schleiermacher, faith was a phenomenon in the deep foundations of a person's inner experience; it was a transformation of self-consciousness that pervaded every aspect of a person's life. Theology, from this perspective, was the systematic exposition of this Christian self-consciousness in a way that would be intelligible and attractive to a particular cultural context.[68] Schleiermacher famously declared, "Christian doctrines are accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech."[69] This was a clarion call to revolutionize theology by reinterpreting Christian doctrines as second-order articulations and codifications of Christian self-consciousness.

More particularly, for Schleiermacher Christian faith was the immediate feeling of being absolutely dependent upon God, modified by the feeling of being dependent upon grace to overcome the internal obstructions to the blossoming of this feeling of dependence.[70] Most basically, theology was the description of the lived experience of redemption from the power of a more worldly self-consciousness dominated by a sense of only relative dependence. Theology, Schleiermacher proposed, articulated the faithful person's sense of being given a new subjectivity through the communication of Jesus' perfect God-consciousness mediated to the individual by the church community.[71] From this perspective, the foundation of doctrinal formulae is not directly Scripture, but rather the power of Christ's God-consciousness expressed through the cultural sensibilities of a particular era.

This new theological method informed Schleiermacher's reconceptualization and reorganization of traditional doctrines. Theology had to be systematized in a very Christocentric manner because the experience of redemption was founded on the impact of Christ on the believer's consciousness. The focal

68 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1999, pp. 52–128.

69 Ibid., p. 76.

70 Ibid., pp. 5–31.

71 Ibid., pp. 52–60.

point was not proofs for the existence of God, the analysis of God's metaphysical attributes, or an exposition of the Trinity, but the restoration of absolute God consciousness through Christ's redemptive life. The divine revelation is the sweep of Christ's whole life. Consequently, for Schleiermacher, the Incarnation was the fundamental principle from which all else was deduced and organized. The Incarnation itself was conceived not as the conjunction of divine and human natures, but as the perfect presence of God in Jesus' consciousness.[72] Sin was viewed not as a violation of moral laws but as the experienced impediment to God-consciousness. Salvation was imagined as the sense of blessedness due to the believer's unification with Christ, rather than as forensic justification.[73] Schleiermacher downplayed Anselm's satisfaction theory of the atonement and shared the Enlightenment's suspicion of penal substitution. But, for Schleiermacher, Christ was far more than the Enlightenment's moral teacher or Kant's exemplar of moral goodness. Rather, as the Second Adam, Christ made a new kind of God-reliant existence available to humanity and thereby recreated humanity at the very center of its life.[74] In this way the redemptive life of Christ is much more than the restoration of Adam's prelapsarian state, for it actualizes humanity's telos which had only been a potentiality in Adam.

Although Schleiermacher's turn to subjectivity was a radical departure from the Enlightenment's focus on the objectivities grasped by reason, he did remain indebted to the Enlightenment in one major way. Theology should be an instance of "*Wissenschaft*," the methodical and systematic reflection that governs all fields of investigation.[75] Christian convictions should be arranged under a controlling idea, according to a rigorous method. As an academic discipline housed in the nascent research universities, theology should mimic the procedures of the natural sciences, the difference being that theology's data comes from Christian self-consciousness.

Schleiermacher's influence on theology and cognate disciplines was enormous. Diverse appropriations of Schleiermacher characterized German theology in the early nineteenth century, mostly pushing Schleiermacher's project in a more "orthodox" direction. Isaak Dorner, August Tholuck, and Karl Ullmann, all exponents of the "mediating school," adopted Schleiermacher's understanding of faith as being rooted in the immediate experience of the heart.[76]

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72 Ibid., pp. 374–424.
73 Ibid., pp. 476–524.
74 Ibid., pp. 365–369.
75 Ibid., pp. 88–128.
76 See Aubert, *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology*, pp. 62–94.

Many of the eclectic proponents of this mediating school added elements of Hegel and Schelling to the attempt to reconceptualize orthodox doctrine. This was a sharp divergence from the "evidentialism" that dominated most of British and American theology. But even in those countries Schleiermacher influenced such diverse thinkers as the Anglican Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Unitarian Gerorge Ripley.[77] In ostensibly provincial Pennsylvania, it informed John Nevin's conviction that Christianity is a "life in which God and humanity are united in an organic way."[78]

Schleiermacher's approach also informed the use of historical investigations in theology. For example, Johann August Wilhelm Neander insisted that Christianity was not based upon "speculative cognitions of God and of divine things" but upon the communication of a new "religious consciousness,"[79] a "new life" that changes human nature "from its inmost center."[80] For Neander, the history of Christianity should be construed as an organically developing "common consciousness" that unites the church in the "fellowship of the divine life."[81] In a similar way the historian and expositor of the Apostles' Creed, John Nevin, claimed that the authority of the Creed is rooted in the fact that it expresses faith's immediate apprehension of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and has the power to awaken such a recognition in subsequent believers. It is not a condensed systematic theology addressed to the mental faculties but is rather "the free spontaneous externalization of the Christian consciousness."[82]

Biblical studies were also profoundly influenced by Schleiermacher. In many ways, De Wette was a typical practitioner of the historical criticism of the Bible. However, he also insisted that the meaning of the Bible must be apprehended by the "heart" rather than exclusively by the historical methods of biblical interpretation.[83] Although he situated texts in their historical contexts, he ultimately associated the meaning of a text with the impact it had on the subjectivity of the reader. The truth of Christianity must be felt experientially in

77 See E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2003, pp. 467–481.

78 John Williamson Nevin, "Antichrist," in *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*, Tome One, ed. by Sam Hamstra Jr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2017, p. 168.

79 August Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, trans. by Joseph Torrey, vols. 1–9, Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1847–55, vol. 1, p. 557.

80 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 1.

81 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 2.

82 Nevin, "The Apostles' Creed," in *The Early Creeds*, p. 69.

83 Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, *Theodore, or the Skeptic's Conversion*, trans. by James Clarke, vols. 1–2, Boston: Hillard, Gray & Co. 1841.

the interior life of the spirit, and not validated by the analysis of evidence and rational arguments. Genuine faith is not a matter of intellectual conviction, not even if the content of the belief system is perfectly orthodox or supported by ecclesial authority.

Many of these thinkers influenced by Schleiermacher, such as Julius Müller, did express reservations about his theology.[84] They feared that he had not attended sufficiently to the dimensions of faith that transcend human subjectivity, including the creeds and liturgies of the church. These "mediators" worried that Schleiermacher may have neglected the objectivities of the faith, such as the objective nature of sinfulness, the ontological composition of Jesus, the efficacy of the sacraments, and the cosmic significance of the Trinity. Most of the mediators wanted to make it clear that the ultimate agent in the production of a person's faith is Christ himself, and not the potency of the individual's volitional and affective powers (actually, Schleiermacher would have agreed). A divine power, objectively existing outside and beyond the individual's consciousness, is responsible for the inception of faith. Because of this, sacramentally inclined theologians like John Nevin concluded that the objective media graciously chosen by this very objective God to awaken and nurture the experience of faith must be valued and preserved.[85]

In spite of these reservations, the impact of Schleiermacher's turn to subjectivity was enduring. In different guises and in conjunction with different theological movements, it would influence the work of thinkers as diverse as Albrecht Ritschl, Paul Tillich, and Karl Rahner. What distinguished these theologians was their divergent analyses of the nature of subjectivity in general and Christian subjectivity in particular.

6 Kierkegaard as an Existential Alternative to Enlightenment Reason

Søren Kierkegaard represents a very different engagement with the Enlightenment, its critics, and its cautious appropriators. Kierkegaard's authorship was sufficiently complex and elusive to inspire such diverse movements as neo-orthodoxy, Christian existentialism, and even theological post-modernism. But in spite of his uniqueness, Kierkegaard was a child of his era, and the Enlightenment cast a long shadow over his reflections. Several different intellectual

84 Julius Müller, *Die christliche Lehre von der Sünde*, vols. 1–2, 3rd revised ed., Breslau: Josef Max 1849.

85 John Williamson Nevin, "The Heidelberg Catechism," in *The Heidelberg Catechism*, ed. by Lee C. Barrett, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2020, pp. 223–254.

movements were vying for dominance in Kierkegaard's "Golden Age" Denmark, all of them negotiating in different ways the challenge of Enlightenment rationality. They all left their marks, positive or negative, upon Kierkegaard's authorship as he adopted aspects of some, modified others, and vehemently rejected still others.

To some extent, Kierkegaard did share some common values with the Enlightenment, particularly the critique of a worldly church and a complacent Christian culture. Like many Enlightenment thinkers, he did resist the alliance of the church, the state, and the general society.[86] Kierkegaard's more general condemnation of all mindless collectivities was an indirect descendant of the radical Enlightenment's championing of the individual's refusal to conform to the values of corporate Christendom.[87] In this sense his drive to be liberated from passionless submission to the regnant ecclesial ethos was an extension of the Enlightenment spirit. Moreover, Kierkegaard's castigation of Christian orthodoxy's tendency to reduce faith to assent to abstruse doctrinal formulae indirectly linked him to the Enlightenment's aversion to dogmatism, even though Kierkegaard's earnest questioning differed from the cool intellectual caution of the Enlightenment.

However, Kierkegaard departed from major strands of the Enlightenment in dramatic ways. Most famously, Kierkegaard roundly condemned the imperious claims of rationality. Kierkegaard was fiercely critical of the effort to construct a chastened form of Christianity upon the foundation of reason.[88] Kierkegaard's emphatic rejection of speculative metaphysics extended to the right-wing Hegelians (although he was indebted to Hegel's dialectic, aesthetics, and much of his cultural analysis).[89] To an extent, in this respect Kierkegaard was the heir of the Kantian suspicion of metaphysics that had roots in the later phases of the Enlightenment.[90] But Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus went beyond Kant's critique of the metaphysical pretensions of pure

86 See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998.

87 See Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978, pp. 68–112.

88 See Roe Fremstedal, *Kierkegaard and Kant on Radical Evil and the Highest Good*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2014.

89 See Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2003.

90 See Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*.

reason, protesting that rationalism's underlying mood of objectivity is utterly ill-suited for understanding Christian concepts.[91]

An aspect of this aversion to the dominance of reason in theology was Kierkegaard's rejection of any sort of rationalistic apologetics to establish or justify religious convictions. He repeatedly insisted that Christian faith is not based on any sort of empirical evidence, calculations of historical probability, the longevity of the church, or on the cogency of metaphysical arguments for the existence of God.[92] For Kierkegaard, not even the argument from design has any merit. Kierkegaard was convinced that an apologetics based on historical evidence or alleged metaphysical proofs is actually inimical to the risky and engaged subjectivity that faith requires. Faith is a matter of passion and earnestness about the shape of one's own life. Passion requires risk, and risk requires uncertainty.[93] The closure that rational proofs might produce would undermine the risk that keeps faith passionate.

Kierkegaard's reservations about the power of reason led to another divergence from the legacy of the Enlightenment. He articulated grave doubts about the utility of the historical- critical approach to the canon, for it made the content of the faith contingent upon the results of empirical investigation in the hope of producing a definitive interpretation.[94] Over against this modernist impulse, Kierkegaard stressed the role of normative Christian passions and existential earnestness in the interpretive process. If the individual brings to the text the appropriate concern for the shape of her own life, its meaning can become clear through hearing it as an address from God, requiring obedience.

Kierkegaard also resisted the reduction of Christianity to a natural religion or a deepening of human religiosity. For example, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Climacus emphasized the difference between "religiousness A," which was a generic form of spirituality, and Christianity, which was based on a particular historical revelation.[95] In his signed works Kierkegaard insisted that God's love is not a mere intensification of ordinary human attractions.[96] In fact, the self-giving nature of God's type of love is potentially offensive to ordinary

91 See Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992, pp. 109–250.

92 See Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1985, p. 42, pp. 72–88, pp. 102–105.

93 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1, p. 209.

94 See Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!* trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1990, pp. 7–52.

95 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1, p. 555.

96 See Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995, pp. 44–60.

human sensibilities.[97] Kierkegaard construed Christianity as a breach with all immanent religiosity, a revelation that invades human existence as an unanticipated gift and challenge.

Kierkegaard's antipathy to the speculative approach to theology was grounded in his basic understanding of the conditions for the meaningfulness of Christian concepts. Kierkegaard was convinced that religiously significant concepts cannot be understood by situating them in an abstract meta-framework, for in such frameworks all words lose their intelligibility. The meaning of a Christian conviction could not be articulated in a mood of academic neutrality, for the mood of self-involvement is necessary for grasping its significance. The cultivation of the appropriate forms of pathos is a necessary (but not a sufficient) condition for understanding Christian convictions. In the pseudonym Climacus' vocabulary, the "how" of becoming a Christian is essential for grasping the "what."[98] Throughout much of his *corpus* Kierkegaard sought to depict, clarify, and elicit the hopes, fears, and loves which are constitutive of the meaningful use of Christian discourse.

In spite of his concern for passionate inwardness, Kierkegaard's writings were not a one-dimensional exposition of a mode of human subjectivity, for he presupposed the authority of traditional doctrines, assuming the supernatural source and referent of Christian beliefs. While Kierkegaard remained critical of the complacency, false security, and misplaced objectivity of the old orthodox party, he implicitly assumed the normative status of the Lutheran doctrinal and liturgical tradition.[99]

In some respects, Kierkegaard's critique of the Enlightenment was similar to that of Schleiermacher and the Pietists. Rather than prioritizing rational reflection, Kierkegaard turned his attention to Christian subjectivity to promote a vision of Christianity based on inward deepening. However, his description of Christian pathos differed from that of Schleiermacher. Although he appreciated Schleiermacher's valorization of Christian self-consciousness, and his resistance to the ossification of faith into a dogmatic system, Kierkegaard suspected that Schleiermacher minimized the ways in which faith is a risky, continuing struggle, and tended to treat it as a comfortable feeling of being dependent upon God.[100]

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97 See Søren Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997, pp. 55–59.

98 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1, p. 202.

99 Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, p. 24.

100 *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, vols. 1–11, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2014, vol. 7, pp. 55–56.

Kierkegaard's effort to evoke the appropriate kind of subjectivity required a reimagining of traditional theological themes and a jettisoning of their metaphysical underpinnings. For example, the concept "God" was illuminated not through an analysis of the divine metaphysical perfections, but through a depiction of the God-directed passions like gratitude, reverence, dependence, and obedience. In Kierkegaard's authorship the Incarnation was elucidated not through speculation about the mechanics of the union of the human and divine natures, but by displaying trust in Christ for forgiveness and resolving to follow Christ the prototype.[101] The pseudonym Haufniensis' analysis of anxiety enabled Kierkegaard to affirm the doctrine of original sin's themes of universality and inevitability without positing a biological transmission of sin from Adam and Eve.[102] In regard to all these doctrines Kierkegaard's insistence that theology must be done in the context of the struggle to work out one's salvation with fear and trembling would find a receptive audience in the post-World War I generation.

7 Conclusion

The Enlightenment and the responses to it generated the urgent questions that would continue to vex theological reflection in the following centuries. Most basically, the practice of questioning traditions meant that theological convictions could not be assumed to be self-evidently true but required some sort of defense. This heightened the tension between the claim that Christianity should be justified and explained by an even more foundational framework, and the claim that Christianity itself is the ultimate framework for all life and thought. In regard to the locus of authority, this friction fueled the debates about the relation of the general revelation, known through reason and experience, and the special revelation, known through the Bible and ecclesial traditions. These methodological debates informed the basic question of how God is known, whether through evidence in nature, scriptural testimony to historical events, fidelity to church traditions, reflection on the evolution of the human spirit, a feeling of dependence on a surrounding mystery, or a spiritual struggle. The answers to these questions would determine whether God should be conceived as the transcendent "Other," an immanent dynamic in history and/or nature, a regulative moral idea, or a mystery present in the depths of human consciousness.

101 Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1991, pp. 23–68.

102 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. by Reidar Thomte, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, pp. 25–51.

The diverse responses to the Enlightenment dealt with these issues in different ways, all of which have contemporary progeny. The use of exclusively historical-critical methods of interpretation to critique ecclesial readings of the Bible has survived in multiple quests for the historical Jesus. The effort to reconcile science and theology lives as a sub-discipline in religious studies and in the popular debates about "intelligent design." The project of integrating secular learning and culture with the particularities of the Christian heritage survives in the work of "revisionist" theologians. The hope of finding an alternative metaphysics to better coordinate philosophy and Christian faith remains the project of process theology. The expectation that the inductive method can uncover the meaning of Scripture thrives in the legacy of Reformed fundamentalism. The turn to confessionalism flourished in the Mercersburg movement, the Oxford movement, and later, in a chastened way, in post-liberalism. The claim that Christian doctrine should provide the framework in which all thought operates was bequeathed to radical orthodoxy. The focus on the Incarnation so dear to the mediating theology would be intensified in the work of Karl Barth. The effort to discern theological meaning in the struggles of human history, a primary concern for Hegel, remains a central foundation of liberation theology. Schleiermacher's turn to subjectivity prepared the way for phenomenological approaches to theology, ranging from Paul Tillich to Karl Rahner. Kierkegaard's situating of theology in the context of the passionate struggles of the individual would become a presupposition of Christian existentialism. In these multifarious ways, modern theology continues to be a wrestling with the Enlightenment's destabilization of traditional certainties.

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CHAPTER 2

Between Enlightenment and Revivalism: Grundtvig's "Matchless Discovery"

Nassim Bravo

Abstract

In this article I would like to present a detailed analysis of a crucial episode in Grundtvig's theological career, namely, his attack against the Professor of Theology Henrik Nicolai Clausen in the little work entitled "The Church's Rejoinder." In this text, Grundtvig reintroduced the fundamental debate about what is the character of the authority of the Scriptures and what is the essence of the Church. Grundtvig will propose what will later be known as his "matchless discovery [*mageløs Opdagelse*]" or "ecclesial view [*kirkelig Anskuelse*]," namely, that the truth of Christianity is transmitted primarily through what he calls *the living word* [*det levende Ord*]: the acceptance of the Apostles' Creed in baptism and the other sacraments. The main purpose of this article is to examine this controversy in order to understand the reasons that led Grundtvig to hold such a position. This analysis will also allow me to present an overview of the theological context in Denmark during the first half of the nineteenth century.

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The theological and religious context of the Danish Golden Age constitutes a microcosm of the religious tension characteristic of modernity, in which the common believer struggled to adapt his or her religious life to the new standards set by the Enlightenment. On the one hand, an official clergy that ostensibly favored enlightened rationalism and its conviction that Christianity could and should be interpreted, understood and lived according to the precepts of human reason. On the other hand, there were the religious awakening movements, with a deep anti-rationalist character, which strongly rejected the intellectualist approach of the Danish Church and understood Christian life as a matter of feeling and an intimate relationship with God. It is in this troublesome context that Grundtvig's (1783–1872) so-called "matchless discovery" took place.

In this article I would like to present a detailed analysis of a crucial episode in Grundtvig's theological career, namely, his attack against the Professor of

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Theology Henrik Nicolai Clausen (1793–1877) in the little work entitled "The Church's Rejoinder [*Kirkens Gienmæle*]" of 1825.[1] In this text, which earned its author lifelong censure by the Danish state (which was lifted, however, in 1838) and the loss of his ecclesiastical position, Grundtvig criticizes a form of theology that he calls "rationalist," whose main representative in Denmark was precisely Clausen. In the "Rejoinder," Grundtvig reintroduced the fundamental debate about what is the character of the authority of the Scriptures and what is the essence of the Church.

True to the Protestant tradition of the Danish Church, Clausen affirms the authority of Scripture as the sole foundation of revelation, although he adds that the interpretation of such revelation needs to be carried out by professional exegetes, i.e., the theologians of the university. Grundtvig interprets Clausen's thesis as a grave betrayal of Christianity, for, in his view, he hands it over to a questionable intellectual elite, the professors of theology. In a parallel way, Clausen's intellectual exclusivism, Grundtvig argues, alienates Christian practice from the life of the congregation.

Instead, Grundtvig will propose what will later be known as his "matchless discovery [*mageløs Opdagelse*]"[2] or "ecclesial view [*kirkelig Anskuelse*]," namely, that the truth of Christianity is transmitted primarily through what he calls *the living word* [*det levende Ord*]: the acceptance of the Apostles' Creed in baptism and the other sacraments. In this way, Grundtvig holds that genuine Christian revelation has its eminent place in the life of the congregation of the faithful, which, in celebrating the sacraments, transmits uninterruptedly from the time of the apostles the *spoken and living* word of Christ. One of the polemical consequences of this strong assertion is that, by identifying the *living* word with the *spoken* word, Grundtvig called into question the authority of revelation through the Scriptures.

The main purpose of this article is to examine this controversy in order to understand the reasons that led Grundtvig to hold such a radical position. This analysis will also allow me to present an overview of the theological context in Denmark during the first half of the nineteenth century. In this regard, I would also like to examine the consequences of the Grundtvig-Clausen controversy within this immediate context. Indirectly and in a way that was at first unclear,

1 Nicolai Grundtvig, "Kirkens Gienmæle mod Professor Theologiæ Dr. H. N. Clausen," in *Udvalgte Skrifter*, vols. 1–10, ed. by Holger Begtrup, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1904–1909, vol. 4, pp. 397–428.

2 To be fair, although Grundtvig was proud of his discovery and regarded it as a milestone in his intellectual career, he never referred to it as "matchless." The expression was coined years later by Søren Kierkegaard, who used it to ridicule what he perceived as Grundtvig's egotism.

Grundtvig's "matchless discovery" constituted a fundamental step towards religious toleration in the Danish Church and the expansion of the freedoms of both the pastors and the congregation. Finally, this research work is also an opportunity to acquaint English-speaking readers with the thought and life of N.F.S. Grundtvig, a controversial figure who has had an enormous impact in various fields and yet is little known outside Denmark.[3]

Thus, in the first section of the article I will describe the theological context of the period known as Denmark's Golden Age, which roughly covers the first half of the nineteenth century, although I will place special emphasis on the process that, from the mid-eighteenth century, led to the religious and theological tension between the Danish Church and the religious awakening movements of the 1820s, which is the historical framework in which the Grundtvig controversy unfolds. Then, in the second section, I will analyze the theological view that Grundtvig confronts in his "Rejoinder," namely, Clausen's theological rationalism. As will be seen, the position of Clausen, who was one of the most influential professors at the University of Copenhagen, constituted an attempt to moderate the radical reactions that had arisen from the introduction of Romanticism in Denmark and the rise of the new religious awakening movements in the region. In the third section I will examine Grundtvig's

3 Although a large number of texts have been written in Danish about Grundtvig, outside Denmark secondary literature is rather scarce and most scientific studies in other languages focus mainly on his pedagogical theories. For general information in English about Grundtvig's life and thought, see Arthur Macdonald Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig: An Introduction to his Life and Work*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 1997; Arthur Macdonald Allchin, Sidney Bradley and Jens Holger Schjørring (eds.), *Grundtvig in International Perspective: Studies in the Creativity of Interaction*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 2000; Arthur Macdonald Allchin, David Jasper and Kenneth Stevenson (eds.), *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-speaking World*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 1993; Sidney Bradley, "Nicolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872)," *The Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2002, pp. 307–325; Lars Jensen, "N.F.S. Grundtvig," in *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures – Continental Europe and its Empires*, ed. by Prem Poddar, Rajeev S. Parke and Lars Jensen, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2008, pp. 73–74; Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, "The Special Case of Grundtvig: Poet, Philosopher, Politician, Educator," in *The Nordic Languages. An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, vols. 1–2, ed. by Oskar Bandle, Kurt Braunmüller, Ernst Jahr, Allan Karker, Hans-Peter Naumann and Ulf Teleman, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2002, vol. 1, pp. 494–502; Jone Salomonensen, "The 'Old Testaments' of the Peoples. Grundtvig's Discernment of Life's True Order (Human first, Christian next) and its Relevance for the New Eco-recognition of Ancestral Bonds in Time and Space," *Dialog*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2021, pp. 145–154; Kaj Thaning, "Grundtvig, An Introduction," *Grundtvig Studier*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1973, pp. 68–84; Christian Thodberg and Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen (eds.), *N.F.S. Grundtvig: Tradition and Renewal. Grundtvig's Vision of Man and People, Education and the Church, in Relation to World Issues Today*, Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab 1983.

complex intellectual journey prior to the polemic with Clausen. In the fourth section, which constitutes the central part of the article, I will analyze Grundtvig's ecclesiological proposal in "The Church's Rejoinder," which places the emphasis on the life of the congregation and its acceptance of Christ's message through the Apostles' Creed, baptism, and communion. Finally, in the conclusion I will pause to examine the immediate and long-term consequences of the controversy.

1 The Religious and Theological Context in Golden Age Denmark

The unfortunate alliance of Denmark with France during the Napoleonic Wars had disastrous consequences for the small Scandinavian kingdom. Denmark suffered the bombardment of Copenhagen by the British in 1807, had to surrender Norway to its ancestral enemy, Sweden, and, to top off the catastrophe, was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1814. However, this external scenario of political and economic crisis was also, interestingly, the catalyst for a period of intellectual splendor that is known as Denmark's Golden Age.[4]

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Danish arts and literature flourished. Illustrious names such as Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844), Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850), Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) and Grundtvig himself came from this period. Such an abundance of ideas led naturally to a state of controversy and effervescence that permeated all aspects of intellectual life and, of course, religious life.

From the time of the Reformation, the predominant religious force was the Danish State Church. It is important to bear in mind that, as a national church, the Danish Church was not, strictly speaking, an autonomous body, but was an arm of the administration of the absolute monarchy. Despite this limitation, the Church exercised considerable power not only in religious but also in civil matters—citizenship and all its privileges were restricted to baptized and confirmed members—and pastors were often the sole representatives of royal authority for the peasants in the countryside. Of course, doctrinal orthodoxy was established by this state church and religious tolerance was limited to a few small groups of Catholics, Calvinists and Jews.[5]

4 For more on the parallel crisis of the Golden Age, see "Introduction" in *The Crisis of the Danish Golden Age and Its Modern Resonance*, ed. by Jon Stewart and Nathaniel Kramer, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press 2020 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 12), pp. 1–7.

5 See Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1990, pp. 27–28.

From a theological point of view, the situation in Denmark was similar to that of other Protestant nations. At the beginning of the Reformation, Luther had placed the emphasis on justification through faith and grace. From that point on, historical Protestantism developed in the midst of a tension between the primacy of faith, a position that gradually developed into a kind of scholasticism devoted to the intellectual pursuit of orthodox doctrine, and the primacy of works, a perspective that gave rise first to various pietistic movements and then, in the nineteenth century, to the new currents of religious awakenings.

This debate was reproduced in Denmark. The "scholastic" position was championed by the Church, which remained vigilant of orthodoxy. The pietistic faction was represented by various awakening movements [*Vækkelsesbevægelser*] such as the Anabaptists and the Moravian Brethren. It is clear that this controversy also had a political and social dimension. The Church, representing also the secular authority of the crown, was naturally interested in maintaining unity and social stability through a clearly and firmly formulated doctrine. In contrast, the awakening movements had historically emerged in the middle of a process of modernization that viewed with suspicion the absolute doctrinal authority of the Church and sought to wrest this power from it and hand it over to the people. Invoking the principle of universal priesthood, the followers of the awakening movements argued that the laity also had the right to interpret the Scriptures and celebrate rituals as they saw fit, even if this placed them outside the law.[6] Thus, the opposition between absolutism and democracy also manifested itself in the religious sphere.

In accordance with their Protestant vocation, the awakening movements held that the Scriptures were the only source of divine revelation. However, they were also convinced, as mentioned before, that everyone should be able to read the sacred texts and therefore rejected the exegetical monopoly of the members of the official clergy. On the other hand, the fact that the Scriptures were the sole foundation of the faith did not translate, as it did in the State Church, into a fervent eagerness to unveil theologically the right interpretation of doctrine; after all, each individual was free to read and interpret the Bible. Instead, their devotion was oriented towards leading a virtuous life, not because they thought this was the condition for obtaining salvation, but because it constituted a sign that God had blessed them with his grace. Thus,

6 See Hanne Sanders, "Religious Revivalism in Sweden and Denmark," in *Building the Nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish National Identity*, ed. by John A. Hall, Ove Korsgaard and Ove K. Pedersen, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 2015, pp. 96–97.

good works and individual religious experience took precedence over theological scholarship.[7] They favored personal appropriation of Christian truth over intellectual assent to orthodox doctrine.

For its part, the Church of Denmark followed from the middle of the 18th century the rationalist path of the Enlightenment.[8] In general terms, this enlightened Christianity proposed a state of harmony between human reason and revelation. At its most radical stage during the regency of Prince Frederick (1768–1839) and his minister J.F. Struensee (1737–1772), rationalist theology asserted that there was no truth in revelation that was not accessible to reason. In this framework of interpretation, the importance of concepts such as sin and redemption was minimized and, instead, emphasis was placed on the practical aspect of the message of Christ, who was seen more as a moral guide than as a redeemer. It was, therefore, a theology oriented more towards providing a norm of life than plunging into Christological or eschatological speculation. Apart from the moral aspect, attention was also given to questions such as the existence of God or the immortality of the soul; however, such reflections were more an exercise in theodicy than in theology.[9]

After the radicalization of the French Revolution, Prince Frederick reversed his progressive program and in 1799 severely restricted the freedom of the press in Denmark. From that time on, the theological rationalism of the Church also adopted a more conservative position. This manifested itself, for example, in the criminalization of those who attacked the Church and members of the clergy, or questioned the existence of God or the immortality of the soul. Nevertheless, the position of the Church, then under the leadership of the primate bishop N.E. Balle (1744–1816, bishop from 1783 to 1808), was still deeply intellectualist, which was viewed with suspicion by many members of the congregation, who perceived this as a betrayal of traditional Christianity. Such resentment was one of the causes of the origin and strength of the religious awakening movements mentioned earlier.[10]

In practice, Bishop Balle, who was responsible for the religious stability of Denmark, took on the difficult task of keeping in check both the more extreme versions of enlightened rationalism, which denied the need for revelation, and

7 See ibid., p. 99.

8 For more on the general development of the Danish Church, see Carsten Bach-Nielsen, "The Role of the Lutheran Church in Denmark," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2012, pp. 293–310.

9 See Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, pp. 35–36.

10 For a more detailed discussion on the origin of the awakening movements in Denmark, see Poul Georg Lindhardt, *Vækkelser og kirkelige Retninger i Danmark*, Copenhagen: Reitzel 1959.

the anti-rationalism of the new romantic current introduced in the country by authors such as the philosopher Henrik Steffens (1773–1845) and the poet Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850), who, in a similar way to the religious revivalists, emphasized the importance of the subjective experience of religion over intellectual assent to a doctrine.[11] Balle's successor, Bishop Frederick Münter (1761–1830, bishop from 1808 to 1830), led the Church along the same line of moderate rationalism; while affirming the supernatural aspect of Christianity, he also insisted that its revelation was not contrary to human reason. Furthermore, it was suggested that the exegesis of the Scriptures should be carried out according to rational principles: it is the light of reason, not that of the spirit, that should interpret revelation.

It can be seen that in the first two decades of the nineteenth century there were common elements between the position of the official Danish clergy and the new awakening movements. Both were opposed to the extremes of the rationalistic deism of the Enlightenment. Both also seemed to prefer the practical aspect of Christianity over a purely speculative theology. But while the Church resisted radical rationalism by adopting a more moderate rationalism, the followers of the religious awakening movements took an anti-rationalist stance. As for the practical approach to the message of Christ, the Church's effort was clearly of an intellectual nature; namely, to discover through a philosophical exercise what was the moral doctrine at the heart of Christian revelation. Those responsible for such exegetical work were, of course, professional theologians. On the contrary, the awakening movements believed that the most important thing was to existentially incarnate the faith through a virtuous life and to devote oneself fervently to the message of the Gospel regardless of the intellectual congruence of its doctrine.

Such is the setting in which the controversy between Grundtvig and Clausen will take place. Although he was unimpressed with the anti-rationalist and

11 At this point it is also important to mention the profound impact that the Tübingen School had at the time on the development of theology in Denmark. In a novel way, the founder of the Tübingen School, Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), proposed a methodology for interpreting Christian revelation from a historical and speculative perspective. Perhaps the most famous case of this approach is that of David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874)—Baur's most radical disciple—and his *Life of Jesus*, a work in which he questioned the historical character of the Gospels. Such a departure from orthodoxy caused a great scandal among Danish theologians, who immediately tried to neutralize the effects of this new revolutionary theology. See David D. Possen, "F.C. Baur: On the Similarity and Dissimilarity between Jesus and Socrates," in *Kierkegaard and his German Contemporaries*, Tome II, *Theology*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate 2007 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 6), pp. 23–38.

unorthodox simplicity of the religious awakening groups, Grundtvig shared their suspicion of the intellectualist elitism of the official Church. Passionate by nature, he also admired the fervor of these movements in their devotion to the Christian life without the inconvenient mediation of complex doctrinal speculation. Professor Clausen, on the other hand, was the perfect representative of the moderate rationalism of Danish Lutheran orthodoxy. His intellectual vocation tended towards mediation: he was an admirer of Schleiermacher's religious subjectivism, but also of Kant's intellectual and moralistic rigorism. His eagerness to defend the intrinsic rationality of Christian revelation and his exaltation of theological scholarship will make him the object of Grundtvig's wrath.

2 The Sources of Revelation according to Clausen's Theological Rationalism

Clausen was born on April 22, 1797 in Maribo, on the island of Lolland. In 1797, his father, one of the most important rationalist theologians during the time of Balle and Münter,[12] was appointed pastor of the Church of Our Lady [Vor Frue Kirke] in Copenhagen, so the family moved to the capital, where Clausen would spend the rest of his life. He enrolled as a student of theology at the University of Copenhagen in 1809 and received his degree in 1817. Between October 1818 and March 1819 he attended Schleiermacher's lessons in Berlin as an auditor, after which he became an admirer of the German theologian, who was to be one of the two most influential figures in Clausen's theological thought along with Immanuel Kant, in whose philosophy his father had initiated him. In 1820, shortly after his return to Copenhagen, he became Professor of Theology at the University of Copenhagen.[13]

12 Henrik Georg Clausen (1759–1840), the father of Henrik Nicolai, was one of the theologians who, in keeping with the moderate and conciliatory spirit of Bishop Balle, tried to temper the excesses of Enlightenment deism. Also in accordance with the theological context of the time, Clausen senior favored the interpretation that saw Christianity more as a moral guide than as a doctrine on the fall and salvation of the human being, a point of view in which his admiration for the moral rigorism of Kant was undoubtedly decisive. See Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, p. 38.

13 See Hugh S. Pyper, "Henrik Nicolai Clausen: The Voice of Urbane Rationalism," in *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries*, Tome II, *Theology*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2009 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 7), pp. 41–42.

In the summer of 1825, Clausen published the work on dogmatics that would trigger the polemic with Grundtvig: *Catholicism's and Protestantism's Church Constitution, Doctrine and Ritual* [*Catholicismens og Protestantismens Kirkeforfatning, Lære og Ritus*].[14] As the title indicates, the book offers a detailed comparison of different aspects of Catholicism and Protestantism. It discusses, for example, the difference between their respective hierarchies, their relations with the state, their doctrinal variants regarding the dispensation of the sacraments, the composition of psalms, the celebration of the liturgy, etc. However, the part that interests us most in relation to the controversy between the two theologians is the chapter dedicated to Church doctrine [*Kirkelære*] and, in particular, the discussion on the sources of revelation [*Troeskilder*] and the role of Scripture and tradition.

In Catholicism, Clausen argues, doctrine is transmitted by the apostles and their followers through the Church itself: "indeed, in order to understand the wisdom and true statements of doctrine and their genuine meaning, even in particular cases, there is no other means than to turn to the explanation and interpretation of the Church."[15] In this sense, the authority of the Church is comparable to that of Christ himself. The fundamental principle is "a marked relationship between Church and doctrine."[16] The Scriptures, Clausen claims, referring to the Council of Trent, are the "visible vehicle" of the Gospel, although it is not the oldest source, "for before a single letter of Scripture was written, apostolic teachings were handed down from mouth to mouth, and from generation to generation."[17] Thus, the source of tradition has preeminence over the scriptural principle.

The Protestant Church shares with Catholicism the same fundamental dogmatic principle, namely, faith in the revelation given by Christ.[18] On the other hand, while Protestantism admits the temporal primacy of oral tradition over Scripture and recognizes that it is possible—and even desirable—that the message of Christ and the apostles was transmitted, preserved and enriched by tradition (for example, in the writings of the Fathers of the Church), this is not enough and cannot be the main criterion: "the possible and the desirable are not taken into account here; reality and evidence constitute here an inalienable requirement."[19] Thus, while Catholicism turns to the authority

14 Henrik Nicolai Clausen, *Catholicismens og Protestantismens Kirkeforfatning, Lære og Ritus*, Copenhagen: Andreas Seidelin 1825.

15 Clausen, *Catholicismens og Protestantismens Kirkeforfatning*, p. 281.

16 Ibid., p. 281.

17 Ibid., p. 282.

18 See ibid., p. 298.

19 Ibid., p. 301.

of the Church to determine the essence of Christianity, Protestantism relies, according to Clausen, on Christianity to determine what the authority of the Church is.[20] This solid foundation for Christian revelation is the Bible.

Up to this point, Clausen's explanation remains within the conventional margins of the dogmatics of the time; he says nothing uncommon. But when he tries to show that the Protestant approach is superior to Catholicism's, the development of his argument begins to present certain difficulties that will force him to make polemical claims. As has been mentioned, Clausen admits that the principle of tradition offers certain advantages. From a temporal point of view, it precedes Scripture. Moreover, its vast richness is capable of shedding light on doctrinal questions where Scripture alone is vague or simply says nothing. However, it has the problem that it remains in the sphere of the merely possible, that is, of the uncertain. How does one know that the doctrine handed down by tradition is the genuine and original message of Christ and the apostles? The only criterion, Clausen thinks, is the Church itself: "The Catholic Church obtains this evidence without further ado by invoking ecclesial authority, which, according to its system, has the function of determining what is Christian and what is not."[21] From Clausen's perspective, the evidence of revelation in Catholicism rests on a blind trust in the authority of the Church.

The Protestant Church does not claim to have an authority of this nature: "the Church is only recognized as having authority insofar as the sacred Word allows it."[22] The criterion, then, is not the authority of the Church, but the Scriptures. But do not the Scriptures suffer from the same problem as tradition, namely, that it is not possible to determine with certainty whether they authentically reflect the original message of Christ? Clausen is forced to admit a number of difficulties in this regard. It is necessary to accept, for example, that several of the authors of the New Testament were not eyewitnesses to the discourses and works of Jesus, which could cast a shadow of doubt on the authenticity of his words. As for the content of the Scriptures, it is difficult to distinguish between dogmatic and moral sentences, between the allegorical and the literal, between what is to be interpreted as a universal message and what corresponds to a specific historical context, between what arises from the new Christian spirit and what belongs to the culture of Judaism, with which it is inevitably combined. To what extent, to mention just one of these

20 Ibid., p. 301.
21 Ibid., p. 301.
22 Ibid., p. 301.

difficulties, are Christian dogmas influenced by the individual idiosyncrasies of the authors?[23]

The guarantee of the genuine and original character of scriptural revelation cannot be the Church, for in that case the difficulty would be the same as in Catholicism, namely, that of being a doctrine that legitimizes itself. Clausen's answer is in line with the enlightened spirit of the time: "only with philological scholarship and philosophical criticism is it possible to fill in the gaps, illuminate the obscurity, determine the vague and obtain a higher unity in the midst of doctrinal and representational differences."[24] It is not necessary to resort to ecclesial authority, since a human being has the tools to interpret and understand the source of revelation; in fact, Clausen claims, "revelation only becomes accessible to the human being through reason [*at Aabenbaringen kun ved Fornuften bliver tilgjængelig for Mennesket*]."[25] The Scriptures, Clausen adds, become "dumb and dead to blind and unconscious faith, and when read uncritically, they go astray and lead to doubt and contradiction; they are designed for beings who possess and use the light of reason."[26]

While Catholicism also relies on the revelation of the Scriptures, the responsibility for interpreting them and deciphering their meaning rests with the Church itself, "that divine oracle [*det guddommelige Orakel*],"[27] whose decrees have the same authority as the biblical text. It must be concluded, then, that in Protestantism it is neither the Church nor its clerics who are responsible for the rational reading of the Bible. For Clausen, in fact, it is the professional theologians, the professors of biblical theology, who must assume the task of analyzing and interpreting freely—that is, without the constraint of ecclesiastical authority—the sacred texts.[28]

The element by which Clausen considers Protestant doctrine superior to Catholic doctrine is that its analysis of the sources of revelation—in this case, the Scriptures—proceeds, according to his argument, from a rational, free and professional study, not from the unreflective acceptance of the criteria and authority of the Church. In this way, Clausen thinks that Christian doctrine obtains a solid, academic and scientific foundation, and, at the same time, avoids the excesses of rationalistic deism, since it insists on the necessity of

23 See ibid., p. 308.
24 Ibid., p. 308.
25 Ibid., p. 309.
26 Ibid., p. 310.
27 See ibid., p. 314.
28 Of course, Clausen recognizes the scientific-theological work of the Catholic Church. However, he will object that Catholic theology is subordinate to the authority of the Church and is therefore not completely free. See ibid., pp. 348–349.

the revelation of the Scriptures, which, in spite of being intrinsically accessible to human reason, retains its supernatural character. As can be seen, the Danish theologian reflects in this work the moderate rationalist spirit of the Danish Church of those years. Like Münter, who was the primate bishop in 1825, Clausen was interested in maintaining a balance between the extreme rationalism that thinks it is possible to dispense with revelation and the subjectivist irrationalism of the new religious awakening movements. But in his solution, he gave unrestricted authority to the intellectual elite of Denmark, of which, of course, he was a member.

3 Grundtvig's Revolutions

As Hellmut Toftdahl suggests, to speak of a single Grundtvig would be inaccurate.[29] Before the controversy with Clausen and the presentation of his "matchless discovery," Grundtvig's intellectual and spiritual career went through several transformations. His initial context was similar to Clausen's. His father was also a pastor and, also like Clausen, Grundtvig enrolled in 1800 at the University of Copenhagen as a student of theology. Such was the usual path for a young man intending to join the Danish clergy. Grundtvig, however, possessed a restless mind and a strong temperament that made it difficult for him to remain on the conventional path of a theologian in training. In the period between 1803 and 1810, the recently graduated Grundtvig was captivated, like many other young men of the time, by Schelling, and soon became an enthusiastic follower of his natural philosophy. Similar to Adam Oehlenschläger, the leading representative of Romanticism in Denmark, the young theologian became a passionate advocate of the revival of the old popular religion of the Norse sagas.[30]

This new mythical fervor is eloquently reflected in his famous poem "The Forest of Gunderlev [*Gunderlev Skov*]" of 1808: "Let us turn away from the trodden path! / This leads not to the altar, / for there where the crowd runs / the gods have not their abode. / I see here a hidden path, / beneath the grass a faint track / trodden by few feet. / Brave friend! Let us follow it!"[31] The altar

29 See Hellmut Toftdahl, *Kierkegaard først – og Grundtvig så*, Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag 1969, p. 57.

30 The most representative works from this period are *On the Norse Religion* [*Om Asalæren*] of 1807 and *The Norse Mythology or an Outlook on the Edda Doctrine for the Cultivated* [*Nordens Mythologi eller Udsigt over Eddalæren for dannede Mænd*] of 1808.

31 Nicolai Grundtvig "Gunderslev Skov," in *Poetiske Skrifter*, vols. 1–9, ed. by Svend Grundtvig (and others), Copenhagen: Karl Schønbergs Forlag and Hyldendal 1880–1930, vol. 1, pp. 39–40: "*Bort fra denne slidte Vei! | Den til Altret fører ei;| Thi hvor Hoben farer frem, | Har ei*

Grundtvig seeks in this period of his life is not that of Christianity, but of the Old Norse gods—or *aesir* [*Aser*]—whose access is restricted to the masses. The poem concludes with a consecration: "A sacred devotion swells my breast / with winged feet I hasten / to throw myself on the altar of the aesir / and praise the departed gods."[32] So great was his enthusiasm that a contemporary, philosophy professor Frederik Christian Sibbern (1785–1872), claimed that at the time Grundtvig was said to be in fact a follower of the Norse religion [*Asatro*].[33]

At the end of 1810, Grundtvig entered a state of crisis and changed his position. He now viewed his former enthusiasm for Norse paganism with astonishment, realizing the difficulties of harmonizing this national mythology with the worldview of Christianity. When the turbulence of the crisis subsided at the beginning of 1811, Grundtvig again appeared in public no longer as the prophet of the old gods, but as a fanatical preacher in defense of biblical purity and Lutheran orthodoxy. It was, however, a gradual process. At first, there was no complete break with the Norse religion, for Grundtvig believed that there, too, it was possible to discover the hand of God. The lines of the poem "The Hill by Egeløkke [*Strandbakken ved Egeløkke*]" of 1811 express this pantheistic sentiment:

> The spirit opened its eye
> and looked to the edge of the abyss,
> and with much effort and care sought
> a Savior; and discovered
> there where it rested its gaze
> God everywhere;
> discovered Him in the song of the poets,
> discovered Him in the words of the wise,
> discovered Him in the Norse myths,
> discovered Him in the course of time;
> but with greater certainty and clarity
> discovered Him in the Book of Books.[34]

Guder deres Hjem. | Her jeg ser en Sti sig dølge | Under Græsset, matte Spor | Sprede sig af sjeldne Fod | Dristig Ven! Vi den vil følge."

32 Ibid., p. 41: "*Og hellige Andagt opfylder mit Bryst. | Jeg iler, jeg iler med vingede Fjed, | For Asernes Alter at kaste mig ned, | Og prise de hensovne Guder.*"

33 See Steen Johansen and Henning Høirup (eds.), *Grundtvigs Erindringer og Erindringer om Grundtvig*, Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel 1938, pp. 117–118. Sibbern immediately dismissed this rumor as absurd; however, he felt it was also important to note Grundtvig's attempt to read Norse mythology from a Christian point of view.

34 Grundtvig, "Strandbakken ved Egeløkke," in *Poetiske Skrifter*, vol. 1, p. 341: "*Aanden oplukked sit Øie, | Saae sig paa Afgrundens Kant, | Stirred saa fast og saa nøie | Rundt om*

However, his biblical zeal led him to distrust the "lights" of the eighteenth century, the influence of which was still felt in the religious life of Denmark. In the essay entitled *On the Human Condition* [*Om Menneskets Vilkaar*] of 1813, Grundtvig laments that the Enlightenment had destroyed the spiritual life of his forefathers[35] and accuses scientific rationalism of trying to show the Scriptures to be obsolete and contradictory.[36] But after his critique of the Enlightenment, Grundtvig turns his gaze to Romanticism. Schelling's natural philosophy, once the object of his admiration, now seems unacceptable to him. Romantic pantheism appears to him as a vain attempt to assert human autonomy, which, in turn, leads Grundtvig to uphold the absolute dependence of human beings on a transcendent God.[37] It is not an irrelevant fact that this period of personal crisis coincided with the general crisis that Denmark was going through. Grundtvig was convinced that his reconciliation with God had saved his life, and he believed that, similarly, the life of the nation would get back on track if it returned to its Christian roots, forgetting the ethereal dreams of Romanticism and the boundless arrogance of enlightened rationalism.

Predictably, the radicalism of this period (1811–1815) provoked the suspicion of contemporary theologians, who, as has been discussed, were mostly advocates of moderate rationalism. Representatives of Danish Romanticism such as the aforementioned Oehlenschläger or the physicist Hans Christian Ørsted (1777–1851) were also offended. Regardless of his pagan or Christian convictions, Grundtvig's intemperate character and his grandiloquent prophet-like attitude eventually isolated him from the main intellectual circles in Denmark.[38]

4 Grundtvig's "Matchless Discovery"

Understandably, Grundtvig's eagerness to subordinate all aspects of human life to the purity of the Gospel brought him closer to the rural Christianity of the religious awakening movements than to the sophisticated intellectual elite

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en Frelsen, og fandt, | Fandt, hvor det faldt: | Gud overalt; | Fandt ham i Digterens Sang, | Fandt ham i Vismandens Ord, | Fandt ham i Myther fra Nord, | Fandt ham i Tidernes Gang; | Synligst og vissest den dog | Fandt ham i Bøgernes Bog."

35 See Nicolai Grundtvig, "Om Menneskets Vilkaar," in *N.F.S. Grundtvig: Værker i Udvalg*, vols. 1–10, ed. by Georg Christensen and Hal Koch, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1940–1949, vol. 2, p. 246.

36 See ibid., p. 254.

37 See Grundtvig, "Om Menneskets Vilkaar," p. 269.

38 See Anders Holm, "Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig: The Matchless Giant," *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries*, Tome II, *Theology*, p. 97.

of Copenhagen. When one takes this into account, it is interesting that in 1822 he accepted the position as pastor of the Church of Our Savior [*Vor Frelsers Kirke*] in Amager, the main southern suburb of Copenhagen, where he would be closer to the corrupting influence—rationalist or romantic—of the city.

Indeed, Grundtvig wanted to be there, in the midst of Copenhagen's cultural effervescence, to try to counteract that influence. However, his fervent anti-urban campaign had a problem. Grundtvig was aware that the biblical Christianity he endorsed lacked a solid doctrinal foundation. The Bible is a complicated source, and in order to adhere devoutly to its precepts, it seems that one must first do the hard work of interpretation. But who should do this work? The laity, regardless of its theological training, as the religious awakening movements wanted? The ecclesiastical authority, as in Catholicism? The theologians of the University of Copenhagen, i.e., the professional exegetes favored by the Danish State Church? None of these alternatives satisfied the demanding Grundtvig.

It was in this context that Professor Clausen's *Catholicism's and Protestantism's Church Constitution, Doctrine and Ritual* was published. As has been discussed, Clausen, who was one of the leading representatives of theological rationalism in Denmark, preferred the third option, that of relying on a free and scholarly biblical exegesis. Despite all the difficulties involved in reading the Bible, Clausen argued in his book that God has given human beings the revelation of the Scriptures to be interpreted in the light of reason. Of course, if such hermeneutics is a rational exercise, it is most appropriate that a professional theologian takes charge of it since, given the rational nature of the task, it would be a contradiction to entrust it blindly to the supernatural authority of the Church.

Grundtvig received Clausen's manuscript on August 20, 1825, a few days before its publication, and immediately began to think of a reply. He first considered writing a review of the work in the *Theologisk Maanedsskrift*, a publication of which he was editor, but in the end decided to delegate this task to his colleague, fellow theologian A.G. Rudelbach (1792–1862). He then resolved to write a reply as an independent text. Thus, on September 5, 1825, just two days after the publication of Clausen's book, "The Church's Rejoinder against the Professor of Theology, Dr. H. N. Clausen," appeared.

In fact, Clausen's work presented itself as an ideal occasion for Grundtvig to begin to shape what would later become known as his "matchless discovery" or "ecclesial view." As has been mentioned, Grundtvig could not find a satisfactory answer to the question of who should be the interpreter of Scripture. So he decided to turn back and reflect on the issue about the essence of Christianity. In the essay "On True Christianity [*Om den sande Christendom*]" of 1824, a year

before the controversy, he asks two questions: What is true Christianity? And: Is Christianity true?

These are two distinct questions that should not be confused with each other. The first question is a historical one and ought to be answered by the apostles and the early Christians; the second question is a matter of conscience.[39] Grundtvig comes to the conclusion that theology tries to answer the first question by means of complicated reasoning and then, drawing on the result of its reflections, tries to answer the second question for the congregation. In other words, the theologian offers a scholarly answer to the question of what true Christianity is and, with this answer, tries to get the congregation, the ordinary people, to accept Christianity as true. However, Grundtvig points out that "we Christian theologians can only present such demonstrations to each other, never to the congregation, who would have to be as learned and wise as their teachers in order to weigh their knowledge."[40] The academic scholarship of theologians—and particularly of rationalist theologians—may attempt to answer the question of the essence of true Christianity (even if this answer is incomprehensible to the vast majority of the congregation), but the question of whether Christianity is true or, rather, whether Christianity is to be believed in, is a matter only for the individual members of the congregation, who, in accepting or rejecting the promise of Christianity, stake their own salvation.

At this point, Grundtvig still accepts the premise that the Scriptures constitute the sole source of revelation. It is there that theologians look in order to answer the question of the essence of Christianity. But, as mentioned, theology has not been able and cannot offer a useful answer to the ordinary, uneducated people of the congregation. But Christianity, for Grundtvig, does not have to be "invented" nor is it the result of sophisticated scriptural exegesis. Church history shows clearly—and on this both friends and foes of Christianity agree—that Christians believe in the word of God as revealed by the apostles and believe that a human being, Jesus, is the son of God. This is Christianity.[41] In a July 1825 draft, Grundtvig says: "Christianity as a creed is neither more nor less than *the* Creed [*den Troes-Bekiendelse*] by which Christians through the ages have distinguished themselves from non-Christians."[42] For Grundtvig, then, the foundation of the essence of Christianity is the Apostles' Creed. What

39 See Nicolai Grundtvig, "Om den sande Christendom," in *Udvalgte Skrifter*, vol. 4, p. 450. For a more detailed discussion on the historical development of Grundtvig's "matchless discovery," see Kaj Thaning, "Den 'mageløse opdagelse's tilblivelse," *Grundtvig Studier*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1981, pp. 7–29.

40 Grundtvig, "Om den sande Christendom," p. 500.

41 See Kaj Thaning, "Den 'mageløse opdagelse's tilblivelse," p. 10.

42 This draft is quoted by Kaj Thaning, "Den 'mageløse opdagelse's tilblivelse," p. 11.

about the Scriptures and, in particular, the New Testament? Grundtvig notices a decisive historical fact: "The Christian faith was first proclaimed orally in the world, and before 'a single iota' of the New Testament was written, the faithful in Antioch were called Christians, so that Christianity was not first named for the thousands of readers of the New Testament, but for those who accepted faith in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, the only Son of God and Savior of the world."[43]

Partly because of his earlier fervor for the purity of the Scriptures and partly because of his training as a Lutheran theologian, Grundtvig had overlooked the fact that Christians, and thus the Church, historically precede the Scriptures. This constitutes the first part of his "discovery." Thus, the essence of Christianity—the first of the two fundamental questions—is not to be sought in the Bible, but in the Church itself and, in particular, in the congregation's acceptance of the Apostles' Creed.

Grundtvig proclaimed this new conviction—the temporal and historical primacy of the congregation and the Creed over the Scriptures—in his sermon of July 31, 1825 at the Church of Our Savior: "It is evident to all of us that wherever there are Christians there are people who are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, people who accept that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God."[44] Towards the end of the sermon Grundtvig insists that the truth of the Creed does not depend on whether or not it is found in the Scriptures, but on the historical fact that "Christians in all ages and in all congregations have embraced it [the Creed]; this and no other is the Christian Creed, so that he who denies it, even if he is an angel from heaven, is flagrantly lying."[45] Here Grundtvig introduces the second part of his discovery: the foundation of the Church is not the Scriptures, but the life of the congregation, especially through its intimate acceptance of the sacraments.

This allows us to understand the subtleties of the context behind the controversy with Clausen. As stated at the beginning of this section, Grundtvig had access to Clausen's work on August 20, 1825, just three weeks after he had preached on the importance of the Creed and the secondary character of the Bible as the source of Christian revelation. On September 5, Grundtvig's reply was published. The tone with which he opens the "Rejoinder" is clearly polemical. Its author does not present himself as a reviewer of the book or as a fellow theologian trying to engage in scholarly dialogue, but as an "*ecclesiastical opponent* [*kirkelig Modstander*]," that is, as someone representing the interests

43 Quoted by Kaj Thaning, "Den 'mageløse opdagelse's tilblivelse," p. 12.

44 Nicolai Grundtvig, "Prædiken, den 31. Juli 1825," in *Udvalgte Skrifter*, vol. 4, p. 393.

45 Ibid., vol. 4, p. 393.

of the Church of Christ.[46] Before offering any analysis, Grundtvig virulently attacks Clausen: "In this book, the professor has placed himself at the forefront of those who despise the Word of God."[47] He points out that, despite his lack of leadership, by his position as a professor of theology and his influence among students, Clausen constitutes a threat. He calls him a false prophet and accuses him of trying to mislead the congregation in order to harm the church. The controversy, Grundtvig clarifies, is not of an academic or personal nature, but is a "*purely ecclesiastical* [*reen kirkelig*]" matter, hence the title of the text.[48] Finally, he issues an ultimatum to Clausen: "As a pastor who is an educator in the Church of Christ, I thus challenge the Professor of Theology, who teaches in the school of the Church, and hold that, if he is an honest man, he must either offer a formal apology to the Church of Christ for his outrageous and anti-Christian teachings, or else resign his post and lay aside the name of Christian."[49]

It is not difficult to see that Grundtvig's attacks are disproportionate, and his description of Clausen's views is exaggerated or even a caricature. The reader will notice that the theological approach in the "Rejoinder" does not abound in detail and is sometimes even superficial. In this sense, it would be unfruitful to seek a deeper theological or ecclesiological development here. This is not particularly surprising if one considers that the text is far from being a treatise on theology; nor was it intended to be such. It is, at best, a wake-up call to Clausen and the authorities at the University of Copenhagen. From a less benevolent perspective, it would have to be acknowledged that the "Rejoinder" was little more than a libel. That said, the virulence of the document shows the fervor of Grundtvig's new theological convictions. If for a moment one sets aside the passionate element of the "Rejoinder," it is possible to identify precisely the points that Grundtvig disapproves of in Clausen's theology. There is, in the first place, Clausen's insistence on the Bible as the sole source of revelation: "In his aforementioned book, the Professor of Theology H.N. Clausen has directly and vehemently declared that he will *not admit* other source of knowledge and other rule for faith in the Church of Christ than the Scriptures."[50]

Of course, there is nothing extraordinary about such a claim by a Protestant theologian, and Grundtvig himself had defended that position with devotion only a few months earlier. But what is problematic is not to maintain that the Scriptures are the source of revelation, but to affirm that they are the *only*

46 See Grundtvig, "Kirkens Gienmæle," p. 397.
47 Ibid., p. 397.
48 Ibid., p. 397.
49 Ibid., p. 397.
50 Ibid., p. 399.

source of revelation. Clausen, in his eagerness to justify the need for a scholarly and professional biblical exegesis, had emphasized, perhaps too vehemently, the uncertain and even contradictory character of the Bible. To be fair, Clausen also points out that such contradiction is only apparent, for the Scriptures, in his view, are intrinsically accessible to human rationality. Nevertheless, Grundtvig finds it unacceptable that in order to obtain doctrinal certainty by means of rational exegesis, revelation should be restricted to a single source that is otherwise obscure and difficult to understand.

But what is really inadmissible for Grundtvig is to suggest, as Clausen does, that doctrinal content not found in Scripture is inadequate as the foundation of Christianity, i.e., that which has to do with the question of the essence of Christianity. Clausen is, of course, referring to the tradition of the Church as the source of revelation (his book, after all, is a comparison between Catholicism and Protestantism). However, Grundtvig immediately associates such an exclusion with his new discovery: "The undeniable consequences are that [Clausen] rejects the original confession of faith of the Church of Christ. He declares that the *Christianity* that has been the subject of confession for centuries is *unknown* and *unknowable*."[51] Since the Apostles' Creed is not explicitly found in the New Testament, the claim that the Scriptures are the only valid source of revelation would seem to imply, indeed, that the Creed cannot be admitted as the foundation of Christianity; at best, it would be reduced to a secondary or subordinate position. According to this reading, the essence of Christianity, as expressed in the Creed, would end up being *unknown* and *unknowable* since, not being found in the Bible, it could not be the object of the exegetical analysis of theologians.

For Grundtvig, this is historical nonsense. The Christian community that accepts the Creed and then participates in the sacraments is historically prior to the revelation of the Scriptures. Here it becomes clear that the central point under discussion is the concept of the Church. To make the Scriptures the sole foundation of Christianity is tantamount, from Grundtvig's perspective, to denying the historicity of the Church of Christ and thus to making it an "empty or debatable fantasy,"[52] i.e., a theoretical abstraction at the disposal of university theologians. But that "conceptual" Church is an impossibility: "It does not matter the dignity with which [Clausen] speaks about the Protestant *Church* as one that does not depend on historical testimony and is therefore a Church in

51 Ibid., pp. 399–400.
52 See ibid., p. 398.

the *clouds*, and it does not matter the contempt he expresses for the *historical* Church, which will remain earthly as long as we do not ascend to heaven."[53]

The Church, Grundtvig argues, is not an ethereal and abstract entity, but is composed of a community of flesh-and-blood human beings who have made the resolution to accept the Creed, thus becoming Christians. This is not an "*unknown* and *unknowable*" phenomenon but is a fact, the evidence for which is attested to by a multitude of generations, both favorable and hostile to Christianity. For Grundtvig, Clausen assumes that the Church is "a society for the promotion of a universal religiosity,"[54] that is, a group of theologians, who, through an exercise of scholarly exegesis, seek to produce a certified doctrine that can be *intellectually* admitted by all. Shockingly, for this kind of intellectualism "the written word is everything and even a word from the mouth of Christ could not change it by an iota."[55] Grundtvig concludes: "To avoid unnecessary polemics, we will allow the professor to believe what he wants about the Church, provided he admits that the *Church of Christ* (*ecclesia Christiana*) is a *community of faith* [*Troes-Samfund*] with a *creed* [*Troes-Bekiendelse*], which is placed before those who wish to join it. It accepts them through *baptism* and *communion* only when they make the creed their own."[56]

Therefore, the Scriptures are not the foundation of the Church; it is the Church, namely, the congregation that accepts the words of Christ, that is the foundation of the Scriptures. And, as has been said, the message of the Gospel is first transmitted orally, not scripturally, through the Apostles' Creed: "The Apostolic *Creed* is the exclusive condition for entering the community that attributes salvific power to the means of Grace, *baptism* and *communion*."[57]

5 Conclusion. The Aftermath of the Controversy

On September 10, 1825, five days after the publication of the "Rejoinder," Clausen announced in *Addreseavisen* that he would establish a libel suit [*Injuriesøgsmål*] against Grundtvig. Two days later, Grundtvig responded, in the same publication, that Danish law should exonerate him from the charges. In the meantime, the circulation of the "Rejoinder" continued to grow: on September 13 and October 19, the second and third reprints of the text appeared. Clausen's

53 Ibid., p. 404.
54 Ibid., p. 406.
55 Ibid., p. 409.
56 Ibid., p. 407.
57 Ibid., p. 416.

complaint reached Münter, the primate bishop, who sent it to the chancellery, which in turn forwarded it to the court. Clausen's students, as well as leading intellectuals and theologians in the capital, supported the professor. Although Grundtvig complained in an audience before the king, the lawsuit was successful. Grundtvig was found guilty: he was removed from his post as pastor and placed under a state of lifelong censure. On May 6, 1826, he delivered his last sermon at the Church of Our Savior.[58]

Ultimately, the "lifetime" censure was lifted in 1838, and Grundtvig was restored to his position as pastor in 1839. The intellectual, theological and social consequences, however, had a more lasting effect. Although the "Rejoinder" was in reality little more than a libel, its impact was surprisingly widespread. Perhaps it was due in part to Grundtvig's reputation as a polemicist or to the sensationalist character of the episode, but many of the relevant figures in the intellectual circles of Copenhagen read the text. While the initial reaction was one of outrage and indignation, Grundtvig's attack also had the effect of bringing the hegemony of theological rationalism in Denmark under scrutiny.

Although simple, Grundtvig's ecclesial view was revolutionary because of the context in which it was formulated. It challenged, first of all, the dominance of intellectuals in the Danish Church. Even though rationalist theologians such as Clausen defended professional exegesis as a free and enlightened way of understanding Christian revelation, Grundtvig pointed out that this academic practice was, at bottom, authoritarian: theologians formulate a universal doctrine and others must accept it, even if they do not understand it. Clausen rejected the ecclesial authority of the pope only to hand it over to his fellow professors.

Second, by rejecting rationalist intellectualism, Grundtvig was giving the congregation back its central place in the life of the Church. Christianity is the community of people who accept the promise of Christ (expressed orally through the Creed and the other sacraments), not an exegetical exercise or the intellectual acceptance of a doctrine. While this idea was not new—it was, in fact, one of the main convictions of the religious awakening movements—it was the first time that it had been forcefully put forward by an ordained pastor of the Danish Church.

Many followed in Grundtvig's footsteps in his struggle to recover a Christianity closer to the lives of the people. Among them, for example, the next primate bishop of Denmark, Jakob Peter Mynster (1775–1854, bishop from 1834 to 1854) and, most notably, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), who despite regarding

58 For a more detailed description of the case against Grundtvig, see Grete Bøje, "Injuriesagen mod Grundtvig 1825–1826," *Grundtvig Studier*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1984, pp. 34–65.

Grundtvig as a rival, also shared his more existential view of Christianity. Mynster strove, like Grundtvig, to preach a Christianity that was less academic, so to speak, and closer to the people; however, on becoming primate bishop of the Danish Church, Mynster had to concentrate, as befitted his ecclesiastical hierarchy, on protecting the religious stability of the kingdom, with the result that it was very difficult to establish a harmonious relationship with the unpredictable Grundtvig.

Søren Kierkegaard, who would become the most famous author—next to H.C. Andersen—in the history of Danish literature, devoted his entire extensive work to demonstrating that Christianity was not a system of theological theses, as the rationalist professors at the University of Copenhagen suggested.[59] What is essential in Christianity, Kierkegaard argued, is the existential relationship between the believer and God, not the content of an objectively established doctrine. Although this notion could bring him closer to Grundtvig's "matchless discovery," the fact is that Grundtvig emphasized the life of the congregation, whereas Kierkegaard insisted on the individual, not necessarily communal, relationship between the person and God. Either way, the common existential element was there. As Theodor Jørgensen points out, referring to Grundtvig's ecclesial view: "Faith must be a matter of experience since it is a matter here of the individual salvation of a human being and thus of his or her integrity."[60]

Third, and this constituted the most radical criticism, Grundtvig questioned the exclusivity of Scripture as the sole source of revelation. This was an attack not only against theological rationalism, but against the Protestant tradition and one of its fundamental tenets: the pillar of *sola scriptura*. Grundtvig's discovery was precisely that the foundation of revelation should lie in the life of the Christian community, in what he would later call the "living word," and not in a document that, inspired or not, is historically posterior to that congregation. It is this oral tradition that validates Scripture, not the other way around; this oral tradition has been transmitted, in turn, through the practice and acceptance of the Creed, baptism and communion.

At first, Grundtvig's ecclesial view alienated him not only from the official clergy of Denmark, but even from the leaders of the religious awakening movements, who were offended and scandalized by his questioning of the authority of Scripture. However, the fact that Grundtvig so fervently defended the

59 It should be noted that, as a theology student, Kierkegaard attended Clausen's courses on dogmatics at the University of Copenhagen.

60 Theodor Jørgensen, "Grundtvigs 'Kirkens Gienmæle' – læst i et nutidigt perspektiv," *Grundtvig Studier*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1992, p. 47.

importance of congregational life had the predictable effect of increasing his popularity among the people.

As a champion of popular Christianity, Grundtvig promoted, for example, greater freedom for pastors [*Præstefrihed*] to practice ritual and preach the Bible; in a parallel and complementary way, he proposed that all individuals should have the ability to choose the pastor of their choice, thus eliminating the parish bond [*Sognebaand*] that obliged peasants to attend the parish in the region in which they resided. This meant, in practice, limiting the authority of the official Church and thus of the Danish crown. Grundtvig realized that his "discovery" was more useful in the political arena, in defense of the congregation, and not in academic quarrels, which otherwise he usually lost.

Ten years after the controversy with Clausen, Grundtvig's proposals were no longer the strident and misplaced ideas of a polemicist theologian, extravagant and isolated from his academic peers, but the demands of an influential religious leader who was absorbing with worrying speed all the congregations that disagreed with the official Church. Faced with the threat of a massive schism, the Danish clergy started to cede ground. In 1838, as mentioned above, the censure against him was lifted; a year later, he was reinstated as pastor in a new parish, Vartov. Grundtvig was allowed to operate freely with his huge congregation, and several of his proposals were incorporated into the new constitution of 1849, the constituent assembly of which he was a member. In the same year, he was elected as a member of the first parliament [*Rigsdagen*] of Denmark,[61] and then, in 1861, he was granted the title of bishop.

Grundtvig's "matchless discovery" was the result of a long and eventful process involving moments of crisis, controversy, and often periods of isolation. But there was a common denominator in all these transformations. From his flirtation with Norse paganism, through his passage as an apologist for biblical purity, and on to the ultimate moment of collision with Clausen, Grundtvig was moved by one central idea: the root of spirituality—particularly Christian spirituality—resides in the people who live it in the flesh and manifest it through their culture, rituals and traditions, not in a small group of intellectuals who dissect this living faith and encapsulate it in volumes that are incomprehensible to that same congregation. The notion that faith is something that, rather than being reflected upon, ought to be lived, is best known through the work of writers such as Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, as I have sought to illustrate in this article, the impact of Grundtvig's thought in this regard is undeniable.

61 Interestingly, Clausen was also a member of the Constituent Assembly and the first parliament. Rivals from a theological point of view, Grundtvig and Clausen collaborated in the political arena, as both desired a more liberal and democratic Denmark.

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CHAPTER 3

Saved Out of the World: A Brief History of Evangelical Individualism

Fernanda Rojas

Abstract

In this paper I analyze the presence of individualism in the doctrine and practices of Protestant evangelicalism. I will describe the historical background that begins in the Modern Age with the Reformation, which lays the foundations of an individualistic-humanistic Christianity that would be further developed by the revivalist movements in the American colonies, and would eventually lead to the Evangelical church of the present day. Then, I will try to respond to some objections to the claim that the individual is central in the evangelical doctrine by analyzing several features of postmodern individualism and evangelicalism.

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In a small place on one of the main streets of Aguascalientes, Mexico, the sound of guitars, a small organ and drums can be heard loudly, accompanied by the melodious voices of three young girls, so similar to each other that one might think they belong to the same family. The service has begun. At the altar, the three girls raise their arms towards the ceiling, close their eyes tightly, gesticulate and perform a sort of choreography that several of those in the pews in front of them seem to imitate. They all look deeply in tune with each other. Although the lyrics of the song are projected on one of the walls, no one really needs them; everyone sings along. After a couple of songs, many become emotional and begin to cry. Some decide to prostrate themselves and fall to their knees on the floor. No one seems to be surprised by what the other is doing, because in fact everyone is so focused on what they are experiencing, while their eyes remain closed the whole time. The only ones who occasionally look around inconspicuously are the children who want to see and imitate what the others are doing.

After some minutes the music is interrupted. The choir steps back as a young man wearing a suit and tie picks up one of the microphones. As he opens his Bible and places it on the lectern, he welcomes everyone. Even though the

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congregation expects him, as usual, to begin his sermon by reading a biblical passage, this time he decides to grab his cell phone first. Imposing and energetic, he begins to read the following quotation that he attributes to Martyn Lloyd Jones: "The message of the Gospel is not that the world is going to be made better, but that you and I are saved out of it." Excited, the congregation shouts with one voice: "Amen!"

With this passage, the pastor of this evangelical church in Aguascalientes expresses a basic idea that, despite the different denominations that currently exist within evangelicalism, is present in an essential way in the doctrine of most evangelical congregations, at least in the Western world. Simply put, the idea expressed is that, far from aspiring to the salvation of the world, the Gospel announces personal salvation that is given outside this world or, more precisely, by coming out of it. This idea, as I will argue in this paper, is another expression of the individualism that permeates modern evangelicalism.

But before moving on, it seems necessary to clarify what I am referring to when I speak of evangelical churches or evangelicalism. In the following account I will refer to Randall Balmer's short but accurate historical review of the term *evangelical*.[1]

Balmer points out that the term begins to acquire a special meaning with the Protestant Reformation, mainly when Luther makes the call to return to the original message of the Gospel, in which it is claimed that salvation occurs by the Grace of God and not by human works.[2] A couple of centuries later, within the large group of Protestant evangelicals, the term "evangelical" would be used more specifically to designate those awakened by the revivalist or Great Awakening movements, from which the need to be born again, to live a pious or morally correct life, based mainly on a literal reading of the Scriptures, and to experience, even in a supernatural way, the manifestation of divine grace, would be more strongly professed.[3]

From the beginning of the twentieth century, evangelicals would become better known as fundamentalists, in contrast to liberal Protestant groups.[4] And, finally, they would be divided into two large groups, which would become

1 Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes have Seen the Glory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014, pp. xv–xviii. For a definition of evangelicalism from an "inside" point of view, see Bruce L. Shelley, "What is Evangelicalism?," in *Evangelicalism in America*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1967, pp. 13–24. I will refer to the latter in more detail in the third section of this article.

2 See Ballmer, *Mine Eyes have Seen the Glory*, pp. xv–xvi.

3 Ibid., p. xvi.

4 Ibid., pp. xvi–xvii.

eventually the main denominations of Protestantism in Latin America: the Pentecostals and the Charismatics.[5]

This is only a general overview of the broad and complex history of evangelicalism. This history will be my starting point and the basis of my paper. I will further discuss it in more detail in order to also try to show how the formation of the different practices and doctrines of evangelical groups cannot be understood if we do not take into account some important historical processes along the way: social and political changes typical of modernity such as the separation between Church and State and the discovery of the New World, in addition to more contemporary events, like the struggle for freedom and the emergence of new democracies. It is also important to take into account the changes in commercial dynamics, marketing and advertising promoted by economic liberalism and industrialization. All these developments are largely responsible for individualism becoming one of the essential characteristics of evangelicalism.

The goal of the present article is to show that individualism is a distinctive feature of the beliefs and practices of evangelical movements. At the end, I will dedicate a brief section to respond to some objections that highlight a number of elements that apparently are at odds with such individuality, namely, biblical objectivity, the aspiration of establishing an objective social morality, and the importance of congregational life. For this, I will underscore some points of connection between evangelicalism and postmodern individualism such as the rupture with the historical, the diversification and personalization of practices and beliefs, and the democratization of speech in the practice of witnessing, among others.

In the end, we might conclude that the phrase quoted by the pastor of that church in Aguascalientes is not an isolated or exceptional event during a Sunday service; the same applies for each of the moments prior to the words of the pastor. Indeed, as they cross the threshold of the church gate the mood changes in each one of the attendees. When they close their eyes tightly as they pray and sing, when they plunge into a state of frenzy because the Holy Spirit of God has possessed them or because a biblical passage or a sermon has spoken directly to them, etc., in each of these moments their conviction is that they have been individually and personally saved out of the world. At the end of the service, they will resume contact with the mundane. They will return to

5 Ibid., p. xvii.

their homes, to their jobs or to school, but in their heads a phrase will continue to reverberate: "we have been saved out the world, amen!"[6]

1 The Reformation and Its Contribution to Evangelical Individualism

The first fifteen centuries of our era have demonstrated to a certain degree that the expansion of the Christian Church could not always go hand in hand with its unity.[7] The sixteenth century would begin with yet another division. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther presented his 95 theses on the issue of the indulgences. These theses became the basis of the Lutheran doctrine of justification, in which he argued that the remission of sins is obtained not by works, but by the grace of God, received through faith.

Although Luther's theses were essentially concerned with the doctrinal issue of justification, they also contained an attack on the ecclesial order. This is evident, for example, in the sixth thesis in which he denies the pope the right to forgive sins on his own authority.[8] The attacks on the papal hierarchy would increase as Luther proclaimed the authority of the Scriptures and the idea of universal priesthood.

Despite the open rejection of Luther's teachings by the Catholic Church and the emperor, many German princes decided to support the reformation, which gave rise to nationalist and territorial churches, in which the ecclesiastical order was replaced by a secular order, whose bishops were state officials in charge of religious matters, but also of secular tasks: education, social assistance, care of the sick, etc.

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6 It is not possible to establish with certainty if this phrase really belongs to Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981), who was an important Welsh doctor and pastor during the twentieth century in England. However, this is an example of the common practice that exists within evangelical communities of quoting small loose phrases attributed to those who are considered theological authorities of evangelicalism.

7 The following section is an overview of the history of the Reformation in which I attempt to highlight those elements that will allow us to understand the development of individualism in contemporary evangelical doctrine. For a more detailed description of the history of the Protestant Reformation, see *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. by David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004; David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*, 2nd ed., New York: Oxford University Press 2001; *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. by David M. Whitford, Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press 2008.

8 See Martin Luther, *The Ninety-Five Theses and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. by William R. Russell, New York: Penguin Random House 2017, p. 4.

This transformation in the relationship between the Church and the civil powers was not minor. For, although for a long time the relationship between the state and the national churches was maintained, the Reformation broke the unity of Christianity in the West and thus stripped the traditional institution and its head not only of its religious power, but also of the political power it held. In the long run, this would allow civil power to become completely independent of religion and, in turn, would lead to changes within religious organizations, which would become less hierarchical and less politicized.

As Charles Taylor points out, this new relationship between the political and the religious is one of the reasons why modernity would be considered a secular age, since the state would no longer guarantee that people follow certain precepts of faith; rather, religious beliefs would pass into the private sphere.[9] This contributed, though not necessarily, to a second and perhaps better known kind of secularity: a detachment from or diminution of religious beliefs and practices. However, Taylor draws attention to a third form of secularization that focuses on the fact that being a believer appears as one option among many.[10]

Taylor suggests that in the modern world, religiosity, like everything else, acquires legitimacy in the individual.[11] We should also take into account the previous interest of Renaissance humanism, and later of the Enlightenment, in making room for the development of the individual outside the institutional frameworks and the overwhelming formalisms of scholasticism.[12]

Luther consolidated many of the changes that were previously being encouraged and that in one way or another would lead to a Christianity that was focused more on the individual rather than on the institution. As Scott Hendrix points out, "the mystical traditions of the Middle Ages taught Luther the value of religious experience and suffering for theology and the Christian life,"[13] which meant that Luther, contrary to exclusively favoring an intellectualist or speculative perspective, gave great importance to the experiential aspect of faith.

With his proposal of *sola fide*, Luther underscored the role of the conscience and the interiority of the believer in the process of salvation, but at the same time he claimed that "The inward experience follows and is effected by the

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9 See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2007, p. 1

10 Ibid., p. 3.

11 Ibid., p. 33.

12 See, for example, Salvador Castellote, *Reformas y contrarreformas en la Europa del siglo XVI*, Madrid: Ediciones Akal 1997, p. 20.

13 Scott Hendrix, "Luther," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, p. 41.

outward. God has determined to give the inward to no one except through the outward."[14] This idea is clearly explained in his way of conceiving the sacraments as visible signs in which every believer receives the grace of God through faith, but this faith is only possible by the outward Word which manifests the promise of God.

Finally, one of the Lutheran reforms that is often considered decisive in the orientation toward an individualized Christianity—and which had also been several centuries in the making—is the translation and interpretation of the Scriptures as a duty that every believer acquires on account of the universal priesthood.[15] However, as Hendrix states, Luther did not suggest that the authority of the Scriptures should marginalize the authority of the Church Fathers and that the only criterion of truth should be one's personal interpretation of the Bible.[16] In a similar manner, Salvador Castellote also defends the Lutheran proposal from accusations of having promoted a humanistic Christianity, since for him "[the] opposition to a visible and institutionalized church forced the individual to unite even more strongly to the absolute God represented by the word of God in Holy Scripture."[17]

Humanist Christianity became stronger with other Reformation leaders, such as John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. Calvin began his contribution to Protestantism when, under suspicion of being considered a Protestant, he was forced to flee France and ended up moving to Geneva at the invitation of William Farel. Very soon, Calvin took on a regulatory role in matters of order or sacramental imposition and repression of dissidents. Such rigorism, coming moreover from a foreigner, ended up making many Genevans uncomfortable. In 1538 the city council finally expelled Calvin from Geneva, and he had to move on to Strasbourg. However, three years later he returned to establish a great ecclesiastical order made up of a body of pastors, doctors, elders and deacons, governed in turn by the *Consistory*, responsible for determining both moral and dogmatic offenses and applying a corresponding penalty. Here the pillars

14 Martin Luther, "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments (1525)," in *Luther's Works*, vols. 1–55, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press 1955–1986, vol. 40, p. 126.

15 As is known, the first translation of the Bible into a vernacular language was not that of Luther. Although before Luther and the rise of the Protestant translation tradition the Vulgate was the predominant version, it is thought that by the seventh century there was a complete translation into Arabic and by the thirteenth century there were several fragments and complete books translated into Romance and Germanic languages. Many of these were burned after the Council of Tarragona in 1242.

16 See Hendrix, "Luther," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, p. 46.

17 Castellote, *Reformas y contrarreformas en la Europa del siglo XVI*, p. 20.

of the so-called Reformed tradition would be consolidated, characterized by its pietism, its legalism, its scriptural basis and its Trinitarian foundation.[18]

In this period Calvin developed some of the theological ideas he had first thought of during his first stay in Geneva. He introduced these in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.[19] In this text, Calvin presents a wide-ranging analysis of various theological topics, among which the subject of the sacraments and his doctrine of justification by faith tend to be most prominent. It would seem fair, however, to point out what Calvin himself considers the essence of his doctrine expounded in this work: "the knowledge of God and of ourselves."[20]

At the outset, the open connection Calvin establishes between the knowledge of God and of ourselves seems to be the manifestation of a Christianity turned toward the individual. In this regard, Hesselink argues that "the nature of our knowledge of God has been variously described as intuitional, relational, and existential. In short, it is experiential, not theoretical."[21] In a more nuanced manner, David C. Steinmetz states that, for Calvin, knowledge of God could be reduced neither to pure cognition nor to the personal encounter between God and the person: "It embraced mind and heart, affections and will, worship and devout work."[22]

In Calvin, as in Luther, we can find a theology in which there is a clear call to the awakening of the conscience and the heart of the believer, while it is possible to trace a strong reference to the Scriptures permeated not only by a personal reading, but by a methodical analysis, nourished by the various contributions of the Fathers of the Church and the evident influence of Augustine.

Calvin, like Zwingli, will try to deny, although not in such a radical way, the magical element that Catholicism had introduced into the sacraments, and will consider them only as visible signs of the invisible grace of God.[23] However, this grace only manifests itself when it is accepted by the believer.

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18 For a more detailed discussion on Calvin's legalism, see John Hesselink, "Calvin's Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. by Donald K. McKim, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2004, p.82.

19 This great work of Calvinist theology has three editions: the first from 1536 and the second from 1539, which correspond to the period I discuss here; the third edition, five times larger than the first, is from 1559. In the following I will refer to this third edition.

20 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vols. 1–2, ed. by John T. McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2006, vol. 1, p. 35.

21 Hesselink, "Calvin's Theology," p. 86.

22 David C. Steinmetz, "The Theology of John Calvin," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, p. 120.

23 See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, pp. 1276–1277.

Grace and faith are two inseparable elements in Calvinist theology; the relationship between them is explained in more detail in the doctrine of justification: "Justified by faith is he who, excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith, and clothed in it, appears in God's sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man."[24] Like Luther, Calvin argues that faith cannot be the result of human effort or good works, thus emphasizing that salvation or justification is God's work alone, since even faith is a divine gift developed within each person through the Holy Spirit. But, unlike Luther, Calvin affirms that the act of justification is accompanied by the act of sanctification, so that the individual whom God saves is not only justified, but also sanctified.[25] As Calvin warns, grace cannot be subordinated to sanctification,[26] yet what seems to follow from his doctrine is that sanctification is the confirmation of justification.

Here is where Calvin paradoxically takes his most important step towards individualism in Christianity, for, although in his considerations on salvation and damnation, the individual seems to have no participation, the only way to corroborate that a person has been saved is because his or her salvation is expressed in a holy life. In this way, as Taylor suggests, the power of God ceases to be something external: the sacred no longer comes to us from outside, but is within us and is manifested in most everyday actions of our lives; salvation no longer depends so much on God as on the good behavior we acquire and manifest through faith.[27]

Taylor further points out how this turn to the individual is expressed in the denial of the sacraments as a means by which God's power is manifested.[28] In this regard, the denial of sacramental power, Zwingli will be one of the most radical reformers.

As Luther's reformation was taking place in Germany, Zwingli began his own movement in Switzerland, and there he developed a reformed theology that must be considered independently of Lutheran theology. Indeed, Zwingli owes many of his thoughts not only to Luther but especially to Erasmus of Rotterdam. What is certain is that, in spite of the many similarities between the two reformers, there was a great point of dispute that announced the later separation between the various Protestant groups.

This dispute was formally carried out in 1529, at the Marburg Colloquy. Here, the Swiss reformers Ulrich Zwingli and Johannes Oecolampadius met

24 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, pp. 726–727.
25 See Hesselink, "Calvin's Theology," p. 82.
26 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, p. 746.
27 See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 79.
28 Ibid., p. 79.

with Luther and other German reformers to discuss issues such as the Trinity, the original sin and the Eucharist. The latter was the great point of contention, for while Luther maintained the real presence of the body and blood of Christ together with the bread and wine, Zwingli rejected this idea and argued that the Eucharist had a merely symbolic character.

In 1525, in his *Commentary on True and False Religion*, Zwingli had already questioned the way in which the word "sacrament" was usually understood:

> For when they hear the word "Sacrament" they think of something great and holy which by its own power can free the conscience from sin. Others again, seeing the error of this, have said it was the symbol of a sacred thing. This, indeed, I should not entirely disapprove, unless they also insisted that when you perform the sacrament outwardly a purification is certainly performed inwardly. A third group has asserted that a sacrament is a sign which is given for the purpose of rendering the recipient sure that what is signified by the sacrament has now been accomplished.[29]

From a biblical and philological analysis of the Latin word *sacramentum*, Zwingli concludes that "the sacraments are, then, signs or ceremonial—let me say it with the good permission of all both of the new school and the old—by which a man proves to the Church that he either aims to be, or is, a soldier of Christ, and which inform the whole Church rather than yourself of your faith."[30]

With these considerations, Zwingli rejects what he conceives as the superstition of the Catholic Church of granting certain external objects supernatural powers. But in the same text, Zwingli also opposes Luther's ideas and openly claims that the Eucharist is only the act of commemoration and thanksgiving for the sacrifice of Christ.[31] Thus, for Zwingli, the Eucharist in itself has no salvific role, since the act of salvation is given only in the death of Christ. In this manner, Zwingli removed the magic or superstitious element heretofore present in the sacraments. Although Zwingli's words deviated not only from Catholic orthodoxy but also from Lutheranism and other Protestant currents, the main source of his theology seemed to be quite Protestant: *sola scriptura*.[32]

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29 Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, trans. and ed. by Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller, Durham: The Labyrinth Press 1981, p. 179.

30 Ibid., p. 184.

31 Ibid., p. 237.

32 Ibid., p. 228. The biblical passage to which Zwingli alludes in order to say that the Eucharist is only an act of remembrance is 1 Corinthians 11:25–26: "After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood:

In time, several evangelical currents would assume Zwingli's position, without even knowing who he was.

During the first centuries of the Reformation, Calvinism and Lutheranism became the strongest Protestant currents as they continued their expansion throughout Europe. At the same time and as part of the aforementioned currents, other reformist movements arose,[33] some radical like those promoted by Karlstad and John Knox, others more peaceful and isolated like the Tyrolean community, and one of the most famous, hated by both Catholics and Protestants: Anabaptism. Many of these and other movements not recognized by Catholics or Protestants were sent to the colonies of the New World. There, new forms of Christianity, and particularly a new evangelicalism, would develop.

2 The Age of the Awakenings

Despite the openness of religious views that the Reformation had achieved, political interests created a hostile environment for such diversity. The various European nations began to take sides between Protestantism and Catholicism, but after the Thirty Years' War, private individuals within each nation would engage in the same debate, as faith became more and more a private and individual matter. However, the decisions made often involved conflict against the opposing side, persecutions that sometimes came from both Catholics and the prevailing Protestant side, always backed by the political power of the time.

Several Catholic, Protestant and Jewish communities that were persecuted by the religious order of the day, saw in the New World the opportunity to live freely with their religious beliefs. For others, focused on the native populations and the opportunity to convert these millions of souls, the New World was a new space of dispute that would make the winning side not only win souls, but also territories.[34]

The encounter with the different religious beliefs of the indigenous peoples and those of the African slave communities, in addition to the difficult economic and health conditions, were not an impediment but one more element

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this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

33 There were, of course, many more Protestant movements and leaders that it is not possible to discuss here. For more on these other Reformation currents, see Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*.

34 See Jon Butler, Grant Wacker and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, New York: Oxford University Press 2008, p. 13

in the set of events that propitiated and allowed the fervent development of the religious diversity that still exists today in America.

While the Spanish and Portuguese brought Catholicism to the center and south of the continent, the settlers that began to arrive from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the north were much more varied: there were Anglican communities, Quakers, Swiss and German Lutherans, French Huguenots, Moravians, Scottish Presbyterians, Pietists and English Puritans, among many others that gradually joined them.[35]

Bruce Shelley argues that this religious plurality led to a new way of understanding the church under the so-called denominational theory, which accepts that, given the human impossibility of fully grasping divine truth, it would be understood and lived in very different ways.[36] But in the end, the unity of Christianity would not be completely lost, since, as Shelley claims, "the denominational theory of the church looked for Christian unity in some inward religious experience and allowed diversity in the outward expressions of that personal faith."[37] Such inward experience was already then the most important element of Christian faith for different Protestant communities and would later become the central element of the revivalist movements and a new generation of evangelicals.

As Shelley and others assert, the direct predecessors of the great awakenings, among which the revivalist movements in Europe and the American colonies are usually included, were the Pietists.[38] Essentially, pietism sought spiritual rebirth or regeneration, which derived from faith understood as a personal experience and not a mere doctrinal matter, and which manifested itself in a morally correct lifestyle. According to Shelley: "They believed that Christianity started with the individual. So, for the first time in Christian history, the idea of conversions of baptized Christians (as well as pagans) came to prominence."[39]

Pietism also established religious practices that even today continue to take place in many evangelical communities; the most important, perhaps, was Philip Spener's proposal to organize small meetings in homes to read the Scriptures and discuss some matters of faith and thus "cultivate a stricter and warmer Christian life."[40]

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35 See Randall Balmer and Lauren F. Winner, *Protestantism in America*, New York: Columbia University Press 2002, p. 13

36 See Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 4th ed., Nashville: Thomas Nelson 2013, p. 319.

37 Ibid., p. 320.

38 Ibid., p. 346; Balmer and Winner, *Protestantism in America*, p. 43.

39 Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, p. 341.

40 Ibid., p. 342.

But even before Pietism, Puritanism had also begun to lay the foundations of contemporary evangelicalism. Its main practices and doctrines emphasized the personal reading of the Scriptures, the individual conversion experience and a morality aimed at purifying the world and even the church itself.

The group of Puritan dissenters arriving in the colonies was quite diverse, including Anabaptists, Separatists, radical spiritualists, and Millenarists. All of these contributed so significantly to the current evangelicalism that, even if only briefly, it is worth mentioning their main statutes and beliefs.

Separatists were those who placed the greatest emphasis on the corruption of the world and of the Anglican Church itself, which is why they ended up separating from it. Spiritualists were characterized by their attachment to the revelation and inspiration of the Spirit, which they saw as opposed or alien to rational knowledge. Likewise, they defended conversion as a strictly individual matter, which could only be corroborated by the inner experience of the convert. The Anabaptists conceived baptism as an act of faith, conscience and belonging that only an adult could perform. And finally, the millenarists, who preached the imminent return of Christ to the world and, in the light of this belief, appealed to different biblical prophecies to interpret some events of the moment as clear manifestations of Christ's return.[41]

Although the individualistic approach of several of the principles of Puritanism is evident, it is also important to mention the social and congregational aspect present in their religious agenda. As Shelley states, Puritanism had both a personal and a public aspect, for, even though it started from individual conversion and redemption, it then oriented its purpose to a moralization of society based on biblical principles.[42] John Winthrop, leader of the puritans in Massachusetts, thus says:

> We must be knit together in this work as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. [W]e must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body.[43]

41 See Balmer and Winner, *Protestantism in America*, pp. 39–42.

42 See Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, p. 304.

43 John Winthrop, *The Winthrop Papers*, vols. 1–4, Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society 1931, vol. 2, pp. 74–75. Quoted in Butler, Wacker, Balmer, *Religion in American Life. A Short History*, p. 48.

These social and even political concerns would also be, to some extent, inherited to future evangelical communities.

After Puritanism and Pietism, the Great Awakenings took place. With them the relationship with the social and political interests of the time would become more complex, due in large part to the encounter with important political processes such as the American Revolution and the establishment of democracy.

It is commonly affirmed that the first revivalist wave known as the First Great Awakening occurred between 1730 and 1750. The beginning of this revival took place mainly in three moments: the rise of Jonathan Edwards' powerful eschatological preaching in Massachusetts, the arrival of George Whitefield in the colonies, and the creation of Methodism in England by John Wesley.[44]

Edwards, in consonance with his Puritan legacy, emphatically points out the sinfulness present in all human beings and the need we have for grace as the only way to salvation.[45] However, Edwards moves away from the political focus of Puritanism, for his aim was not on the civil order and its relationship with an established church, but on a new order centered on the personal conversion of each believer. Whitefield's message is in this same spirit, but every word was embellished with his renowned oratory and his charismatic and even theatrical mood with which he reached thousands of people.[46]

One could argue that Wesley's contribution to revivalism comes from his own narrative of his conversion process, strongly influenced by the Moravians and by Whitefield himself. In his diary, Wesley relates the much cited episode of February 7, 1735, in which, embarrassed by his fear of the strong storms on his way to Georgia, he had a conversation with Spangenberg, pastor of the Moravians, which had a great impact on him:

> I soon found what spirit he was of; and asked his advice with regard to my own conduct. He said, "My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?" I was surprised, and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" I paused, and said, "I know he is the Savior of the world." "True," replied he; "but do you know he has saved you?" I answered, "I hope he

44 See Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, p. 347.

45 See Balmer and Winner, *Protestantism in America*, p. 45.

46 On Whitefield's histrionic tendencies, see Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism,* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans 1991.

> has died to save me." He only added, "Do you know yourself?" I said, "I do." But I fear they were vain words.[47]

The emphasis on personal conversion as the decisive element of religious life caused the revivalists to join the work of enlightened secularism in advocating individual freedom, which implied a more radical break between church and state, for faith was not to be coerced or influenced by civil power, but was to be a matter of conscience and will. In this sense, revivalism converged with the ideas of patriots such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. The latter, moved by the impulses of reason and the former by faith, paved the way for what they thought of as an independent, free and truly Christian America.

Theologically, however, the revivalists did not agree with Protestant theologians who had developed a rational, enlightened theology, more liberal in content, but conservative in form, which was expressed in the solemnity of their rites. For the latter, the revivalists were too emotional, their leaders were not very educated and their theology was very conservative, mainly in the moral aspect. These differences marked the distinction between the so-called "old lights" and the "new lights."[48] The latter, ignited by the revivalists, are the ones that would illuminate the path towards today's evangelicalism.

The mixture of freedom, emotionality and expressiveness characteristic of revivalism also favored the connection of Protestantism with the ideals of equality of the nascent democracy and even, in principle, extended these ideals to women and black people. Southern evangelical communities began to include mostly blacks and white women, who played important roles in their congregations, especially in setting the emotional and spiritual stage for conversion.

Several Protestant leaders began to advocate abolitionism, and in the northern churches some of the foundations of the women's rights movement were laid. However, this attempt at equality quickly faded. White men saw in the ecclesiastical exercise of women a danger of disobedience to husbands and disintegration of the patriarchal family order. In the South, the same people who had once attacked slavery began to buy slaves.

Heading towards the Civil War, several of the northern evangelicals decided to push for social reforms especially in favor of abolition, while in the South

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47 John Wesley, *The Complete Works of John Wesley. Volume 1 Journals 1735–1745*, 3rd ed., Albany: AGES software 1996, p. 37.

48 The following description of American revivalism is based on Balmer and Winner, *Protestantism in America*, pp. 45–57.

the preachers undertook their own defense of slavery backed by a literal reading of the Scriptures.

But before the war came, in the early nineteenth century revivalism would have a new lease of life known as the Second Great Awakening. This time, Charles Grandison Finney would be one of the leading revivalists in America's evangelical communities. Following the principles of the first awakening, the new revivalism emphasized biblical authority, the conversion experience and the need to evangelize. However, this second awakening introduced an important change: the belief that the individual did not passively receive God's unmerited grace, but could actively accept or reject divine grace.[49]

Thus, Arminianism, which had emerged two centuries earlier and which had already attempted to enter revivalist theology with John Wesley,[50] would become the dominant doctrine of evangelicalism from the nineteenth century onward. With the ideas of Arminius, the theory of Calvinist predestination would be questioned to a certain extent, because instead of believing that it is God who chooses us, election would become a matter of human will.[51]

Finney goes a little further and shows the implications to which this capacity to choose leads. First, he assumes that it is possible to choose good over evil, and that, consequently, each person is responsible for making or not making that choice.[52] Second, if we can freely and consciously choose not to choose evil, then we can orient ourselves towards a certain state of perfection in which we no longer wish to sin.[53] Such an ideal of perfection led to a renewed pietism that consisted both in rejecting such things as alcoholism and smoking, and in promoting charity, support for women, the poor and slaves.[54]

This aspiration towards perfection also harmonized with the optimism of the postmillennialist doctrine that had been promulgated in the first awakening by Jonathan Edwards and which held that Jesus would come after the millennium, understanding this as a time of hope, peace and joy.[55] With this idea in mind, the path to perfection was not only to be an individual path, but would have to lead to a social reform that would prepare this world for the return of Christ.

Along the same line of social reform, between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the so-called liberal

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49 See Butler, Wacker and Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, p. 172.
50 See Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, p. 353.
51 See Balmer and Winner, *Protestantism in America*, p. 58.
52 See Butler, Wacker and Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, pp. 177–178.
53 Ibid., p. 178.
54 See Balmer and Winner, *Protestantism in America*, pp. 59–60.
55 Ibid., p. 57.

Protestantism arose. This was a type of Protestantism that sought to build bridges between Christianity and the various forms of knowledge that had emerged in modernity, which was why it was theologically questionable, because in the search for this union it had sacrificed traditional doctrinal considerations on biblical authority, the figure of Christ and the notion of salvation.[56] But beyond their theological reforms, they promoted a social gospel that was focused "not only on the redemption of sinful individuals but on the redemption of sinful social structures as well."[57] Aware of the corruption and injustices of society's political and economic systems, they directed their efforts to modifying such systems.

In contrast, the more conservative evangelicals abandoned their postmillennialist trust and even exchanged it for the premillennialist confidence that Christ would come first for true Christians and then begin the judgment in which the others would be condemned.[58] This new belief intensified the interest in individual conversion and moralization, while putting aside the responsibility for making social changes, for they considered that the world would only get worse and that the only hope would be for individuals who truly converted and had faith in Jesus.[59]

In more formal and radical opposition to modernity and theological liberalism, the fundamentalists emerged, a religious movement that was created around a series of essays by various authors published in twelve volumes between 1910 and 1915, known as *The Fundamentals*.[60] The central purpose of these essays was the defense of the true faith: one third of them were devoted to the defense of biblical inerrancy, another third to traditional theological issues such as salvation, the trinity and sin, and the rest, in a more diverse way, dealt with doctrinal issues, criticisms, testimonies, etc.[61]

This movement was crossed by the First World War and the post-war crisis in which an atmosphere of hostility and resistance to change was generated, which led to extremism from which fundamentalism also ended up being nourished.[62] This meant that, although they won battles against modernity, such as the Scopes

56 See Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, pp. 410–411.

57 Balmer and Winner, *Protestantism in America*, pp. 59–60.

58 Ibid., p. 62.

59 Ibid., p. 85.

60 *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, vols. 1–12, Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company 1910–1915. See George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed., New York: Oxford University Press 2006, p. 118.

61 Ibid., pp. 119–120.

62 Ibid., p. 201.

trial,[63] in the end they lost the support of society. As Balmer and Winner state, "evangelicals lost the most important battle, the larger cultural battle."[64] This loss caused their rejection and exclusion, but it did not stop there, for "As the world mocked evangelicals, evangelicals in turn condemned the world."[65]

Fundamentalists began to reject everything they considered worldly: smoking, alcohol, gambling, the use of makeup and short skirts on women, among other things.[66] But this only succeeded in alienating them further. Fundamentalism then began to lose its social base, and the only thing that could maintain its cohesion was the adherence of each individual believer to the movement's own doctrines.[67]

In the 1950's another kind of revivalism, perhaps the last one to date, would arrive in the United States and in several places in Latin America. This new revivalist wave was driven by Bill Graham with what he himself called his crusade. With him, evangelicals reached radio, television and even politics. Evangelicalism resurfaced in society. Its great impact on the public sphere made several of the evangelical communities attractive in the political arena and even became instrumental in the presidential careers of figures such as Carter and Reagan.[68]

As a result of the political interests of evangelical conservatism, between the 1970's and '80's the movement known as Religious Right arose. This movement gave rise to a renewed social activism that mixed the negative premillennialist vision of the end of the world with the postmillennialist purpose of reforming society in accordance with certain moral principles.[69]

Finally, this revivalism is responsible for consolidating and strengthening the most recent evangelical trends such as Pentecostalism and the charismatic and holiness movements. With these, new forms of establishing contact with the world would appear. Evangelicals are beginning not only to become influential in politics, but also in the entertainment media; they are building megachurches and organizing massive concerts that regularly sell out. From these new platforms, several are reconciled with worldly elements such as fame and money,[70] as they consider the acquisition of political and economic power as

63 In 1925, teacher John T. Scopes was tried and found guilty of teaching evolutionary theory in the Tennessee public school. See Balmer and Winner, *Protestantism in America*, p. 64.
64 Ibid., p. 64.
65 Ibid., p. 64.
66 Ibid., p. 65.
67 See Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, p. 205.
68 See Balmer and Winner, *Protestantism in America*, p. 35.
69 Ibid., p. 67.
70 Ibid., p. 67.

manifestations of God's blessing or the flow of the Spirit. However, this does not take them away from their mission of announcing the debacle of the world, now largely produced by communist systems, feminist and homosexual movements, among others.

3 Postmodern Individualism and Evangelicalism

In his description of evangelicalism, Bruce L. Shelley reaffirms—not only as a theologian and historian, but also as a member of the evangelical community—several of the aspects that I have pointed out here as essential to evangelicalism: the emphasis on personal conversion or spiritual rebirth,[71] the need to model life according to God's precepts, following the doctrine and the gospel from the heart or from the experience of faith,[72] the trust in the Word revealed in the Scriptures,[73] and the conviction that the ultimate task is to share the Gospel with everyone.[74]

Nevertheless, in this same description, Shelley openly rejects the notion that some of the aforementioned aspects allow us to qualify evangelicalism as individualistic. First, he objects to the idea that the unprecedented emphasis that began to be placed on Scripture in early revivalism has led evangelicals into pure subjectivity. On the contrary, he argues that reliance on the Bible as supreme authority does not appeal, as the Quakers did, to a mere spiritual revelation that speaks to the heart of every human being, but is first and foremost an opposition both to enlightened Christianity, which sought to grasp divine truth through human reason, and to liberal, secularized and humanistic Christianity, which, by mixing Christianity with modern ideas, had pushed aside the message of Jesus.[75]

His second objection is to the assumption that evangelical morality is merely individualistic. On the one hand, he argues, history gives sufficient account of the various social works that evangelicalism has carried out, and, on the other hand, it should be understood that the concern for individual morality is also oriented towards social reform, since this would not be possible without it.[76]

From an anthropological approach, Omri Elisha also opposes considering evangelicalism in terms of pure individualism; the reasons he gives focus

71 See Shelley, *Evangelicalism in America*, pp. 14–15.
72 Ibid., p. 17.
73 Ibid., pp. 19–20.
74 Ibid., p. 23.
75 Ibid., pp. 20–21.
76 Ibid., p. 24

on the way in which evangelicals lead their lives and, especially, their moral behavior, which is eminently developed within the congregational sphere.[77]

In particular, Omri Elisha observes the way in which members of small cell or home-based prayer and Bible study groups behave; thus, he notes that "intrinsically, such groups attend to the needs, fears, and desires of individual believers, reinforcing Protestant ethics of self-discipline and self-actualization."[78] However, Elisha argues that the results that in these groups each believer obtains are driven by "a relational imperative, a model of sociality (that is, how social connections are formed and maintained) that stresses the virtues of radical interdependence among people of faith."[79]

To respond to these objections, it is important to point out that, just as contemporary evangelicalism, despite having its basis in modernity, has changed over these last centuries, so too the concept of individualism has undergone certain important changes to which I will refer by making a brief synthesis of what has been said so far.

At the beginning of modernity, when we can properly speak of the establishment of individualism, this emerges with a clear scientific or epistemological tinge, since it rests on the revolutionary theories of Bacon, Galileo, Copernicus and Newton, which shakes both the traditional philosophical principles and the Scriptural principles defended by Christianity. Descartes joins this revolution of knowledge and proposes, through his scientific method, what will be the task of modernity: to make the "I" the center of the discussion; the subject on whom all certainty of knowledge will rest.

A century later, Kant presents the foundations of enlightened individualism, when, on the one hand, in line with Descartes, he claims that reality is not perceived passively by the subject, but is determined by the conditions of human understanding. And, on the other hand, when he promulgates as the essence of Enlightenment the emancipation of the subject who asserts his or her reason and autonomy above all things. However, in opposition to pure rationalism, Kant leaves a small space for an indeterminable or unknowable reality which he calls the noumenal world. This, however, is rejected by Fichte, who, in line with the ideals of the Enlightenment, makes all reality dependent on the subject, thus granting infinite freedom to the thinking I.

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77 See Omri Elisha, "Personhood: Sin, Sociality, and the Unbuffered Self in US Evangelicalism," in *The Anthropology of Global Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism*, ed. by Simon Coleman and Rosalind I.J. Hackett, New York and London: New York University Press 2015, pp. 41–56.

78 Ibid., p. 42.

79 Ibid., p. 42.

As was mentioned, the Enlightenment also brought together political and social events that made it an era of secularization, a fact that did not lead exclusively to atheism, as it was even supported by theological positions—mainly Protestant—capable, to a certain extent, of demystifying—or, following Taylor, of disenchanting[80]—the divine and making it more human.

If individualism had remained only a product of the Enlightenment, whose validity we could perhaps see more clearly in liberal Protestantism, then it would probably be a mistake to attribute it to the current evangelicalism crossed by all the revivalist movements largely opposed to rationalization. It would seem that this is what Shelley has in mind when he denies the possible subjectivity of revivalist evangelicalism because in response to modern rational superiority, evangelicals, distrustful of human reason, concede all authority to "the written and infallible Word."[81]

However, Shelley overlooks two important issues regarding evangelicals' use of the Bible. On the one hand, he seems to forget that common or universal access to the Scriptures depends both on the idea that the Bible can be read by anyone and on the advent of the printing press, both of which are essential in the development of enlightened individualism. On the other hand, even if we were to assume that evangelicals' reading of the Bible does not start from the rationalist assumption that human beings can understand the truth written in it, and that neither is it done only from inner spiritual guidance, what could hardly be denied is that, in practice, the evangelical mandate to make the Biblical text the sole source of authority has not led evangelicalism to a single objective truth, but to a proliferation of interpretations, which, inescapably, reveal the subjection of the Scriptures not only to the mind, but also to the will of the individuals who read them.

It is here that evangelicalism shows a new phase of individualism, since the "I" sustained in German idealism, from Kant to Hegel, had been understood as a category and not as an individual "I." But it will be in opposition to this abstract individuality of rationality that individualities will multiply. This is partly the work of Romanticism, which twists Fichte's idealism and places the infinite freedom of the abstract I in the hands of particular individuals, who, contrary to pure reason, are constituted of emotions, experiences and freedom.[82]

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80 See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 25–26.

81 See Shelley, *Evangelicalism in America*, p. 20

82 See Jon Stewart, *An Introduction to Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Issue of Religious Content in the Enlightenment and Romanticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2022, pp. 79–114.

I think it is possible to underscore the strong ties that romantic individualism has with the evangelicalism of the Great Awakenings: the preeminence of the emotional aspect over reason; the libertarian, autonomous and democratic spirit, of course also fostered by the revolutions; and even the nostalgia for the past that is manifested in one of the ideals proper to some versions of current evangelicalism: restorationism, the wish of returning or being the continuation of the only genuine Christianity worthy of imitation, which is that of the primitive church.[83]

However, it would be an exaggeration to affirm that evangelicalism reaches the extreme of the exacerbated individualism of Romanticism in which freedom seems to have no limits. This is because the evangelical is held back by God and the ideal of objective morality. In this sense, evangelicalism could be more closely related to a more moderate position such as that of Søren Kierkegaard, which Shelley himself cites in support of the evangelical presupposition that being a Christian consists in the existential relationship between each individual and God.[84]

For Kierkegaard, the individual does not have the power that the Romantics attributed to him or her to create realities at his or her own discretion; however, he does emphasize that reality only makes sense to an individual insofar as it affects his or her existence. This way of understanding individuality in Christianity could explain the evangelical idea that, although the individual does not have the power to save him or herself, salvation is effectively given only when the individual accepts and models his or her life on the statutes of faith to which he or she freely adheres.

With all that has been discussed up to this point, it would seem that the relationship between a certain individualism and the issue of choice and personal salvation is out of the question. In other words, it would be difficult for anyone to oppose the idea that in evangelicalism Christianity begins in the individual: in the rebirth or conversion process, in the experience of faith and in the moral regulation of his or her life according to the Bible. But it is precisely in this moral regulation that both Shelley and Elisha affirm that evangelicalism ceases to be pure individualism, since what they suggest is that evangelicals try to act in a morally correct way in conjunction with others—thanks to cooperative work—and for others—because it is in this way that social morality is formed. If we add to this the scriptural foundation on which such morality is based, individualism would seem, then, to be sufficiently refuted.

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83 See Edith L. Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the History of American Pentecostalism*, vols. 1–2, Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House 1989, p. 18.

84 See Shelley, *Evangelicalism in America*, pp. 15–16.

It is here, however, that postmodern individualism could offer us a new perspective on the matter. According to Gilles Lipovetsky, in postmodern times personalization becomes the fundamental element of society, the sources of information and the different consumer products increase and diversify to satisfy particular needs: existence is à *la carte*.[85] For Lipovetsky, the result of all this is narcissism: absolute individualism.[86]

At first glance, this would seem to be such a radical individualism that it would prevent any kind of social, political and, of course, religious association. However, contrary to isolation, the postmodern individual seeks collectivity, seeks the public sphere and even the political arena. But in each of these spaces what he or she does is to reaffirm his or her personal interests, so he or she resorts to associating with his or her peers, with other individuals almost identical to him or herself, with those who share very specific interests, so that together they can cooperate to achieve the same goals.[87] This is what Lipovetsky calls "collective narcissism."[88]

I would argue that it is possible to observe these characteristics in many of the evangelical collectivities, including that small congregation in Aguascalientes in which the individuals are replicas of the same individual, a great I that seems to take us back to the modern subject, only this time it is not an abstract subject, but a subject with very particular traits, a subject that in its relationship with God must act in very specific ways, from singing, dancing, closing its eyes or raising its hands in a certain way, to regulating its relationships, its words, actions and thoughts according to certain criteria. This homogenization, contrary to eliminating individuality, reinforces it, for it reflects how the individual in the "need to find himself or to annihilate himself as a subject... [is] capable of consenting to the most drastic imperatives."[89]

In contemporary evangelical congregations, the binding of the individual to the collective in which he or she attempts to construct and deconstruct him- or herself according, primarily, to certain moral regulations, ends up in the end satisfying his or her self-interests, which are not exhausted in the act of salvation. Evangelicalism, which has incorporated among its beliefs doctrines such as the so-called "prosperity theology," makes God appear to satisfy particular individual needs or tastes, such as sentimental relationships, jobs, houses, cars,

85 See Gilles Lipovetsky, *La era del vacío. Ensayos sobre el individualismo contemporáneo*, trans. by Joan Vinyoli and Michele Pendanx, Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama 1986, p. 19.
86 Ibid., p. 12.
87 Ibid., pp. 13–14.
88 Ibid., p. 14.
89 Ibid., p. 119.

etc. This is also a reflection of how in postmodern times, control mechanisms do not disappear, but turn instead to seduction and therefore the individual accepts them.[90]

In the postmodern era, seduction takes place through the different media: television, magazines and radio, which are nowadays surpassed by the internet and social networks. All these media are presented as favorable spaces for advertising and marketing, allowing to increase material and ideological consumption through the offer of an increasingly abundant and diverse content. As I pointed out before, evangelicalism, in spite of its conservatism, did not remain on the sidelines of these cultural and technological movements, but, since the revival produced by Bill Graham in the United States, it has incorporated them into its communication channels, through which it has spread its ideas to millions of people. The increase in their offer has allowed them to acquire exclusive channels for televangelists and their musical productions can be found even in the least thought of genres such as reggaeton and heavy metal.

It cannot be denied that all this has made evangelicalism have a social and especially political impact, since its platforms have been democratized to the point that, not only in a common Sunday service several parishioners can take the microphone to give testimony of what happened to them the day before, but in election times the strongest candidates can use this same microphone to expose their campaign proposals.

But this immersion in the social and political sphere does not cease to be from and for the individual, not only because, as I have already mentioned, the evangelical seeks to relate almost exclusively to those who have the same interests as him or her, and his or her community becomes the means to satisfy such interests,[91] but also because, after all, fulfilling or not fulfilling his or her objectives is the absolute responsibility of each individual. We must remember that not only salvation is personal, but condemnation is also personal. This, of course, is another quality common to postmodernity in which "socialization and desocialization are identified, in the end...everyone buckles his own seat belt."[92]

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90 Ibid., pp. 17–33. See also Gilles Lipovetsky, *Plaire et toucher: essai sur la societé de seduction*, Paris: Gallimard 2017.

91 Of course, the most obvious exception to this behavior is evangelization missions. However, it is also obvious that in this case the exception only confirms the desire to relate to similar individuals, which one makes similar through seduction.

92 Lipovetsky, *La era del vacío. Ensayos sobre el individualismo contemporáneo*, p. 24.

4 Dichotomies of Evangelical Individualism

Although throughout my historical review of the development of evangelicalism I have tried to trace the most common characteristics that could, to a certain extent, configure the identity of evangelicals, at present there are evangelical communities with many different doctrinal and practical aspects, which could be the clearest manifestation of the individualism that runs through them.

Aware that this evangelical plurality would seem to be contradictory to the homogenization that is experienced within each congregation, I would like to expose other contradictions that evangelicalism has managed to sustain in part thanks to its relationship with postmodern individualistic logic.

Regarding the pluralism and homogenization of its congregations, I emphasize that homogeneity usually arises from the similarities between the particular interests of each individual and those with whom he or she congregates. However, when these interests change and differ, the evangelical has the opportunity to find another congregation that better suits his or her interests.

Such differences between evangelical communities can range from aesthetic, especially with respect to their liturgical forms, to more serious doctrinal matters. Interestingly, the latter are based on another paradoxical parity, already mentioned above, between making the Bible the sole doctrinal authority and at the same time promoting a personal reading that ends up leading to an endless number of interpretations.

Finally, evangelicalism has also established a rupture with history, with the Catholic and even Protestant tradition, while at the same time it has adopted principles and practices that arose within those traditions.[93] This historical discontinuity allows evangelicalism to assume itself as the direct successor of the primitive church, and at the same time to innovate with a new and more attractive liturgical model of flashy musical styles, greater use of modern means of communication, temples that seem like secular spaces, and religious leaders who, similar to the seductive political figures of the postmodern age,[94] appear more jovial, closer to the people, without a religious formal attire or outstanding academic degrees.

93 Again, the clearest example in this regard is the attachment to the Scriptures, whose canon was formed, translated and disseminated thanks to the contributions of Catholicism and historical Protestantism, but this is something that is often ignored or overlooked within evangelicalism.

94 See Lipovetsky, *La era del vacío*, p. 25.

Moreover, it is this historical rupture that perhaps has not allowed evangelicalism to be aware of its own history and of the fact that in its development lies the continuity of a task that has been essential of modernity: to make the individual the center of everything, including religious beliefs.

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PART 2

Philosophy of Religion

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CHAPTER 4

Common Sense in Mendelssohn, Feuerbach, Gadamer and Habermas: The Role of Skepticism in the Modern Understanding of Religion from the Enlightenment to Philosophical Hermeneutics

Kristína Bosáková

Abstract

The concept of common sense (*sensus communis*) serves as the methodological basis of the human sciences. It is inspired by the practical wisdom of Aristotle, which is expressed by the Greek term φρόνησις (in Latin, *prudentia*) in its original meaning. This paper intends to examine the skeptical or more common sense-based approach to the religious tradition from the Enlightenment to the present day, with an emphasis on the philosophies of religion formulated by Mendelssohn, Feuerbach, Gadamer, and Habermas. All four expressed their doubts about the reliability of speculation as a source of knowledge and consider practice to be the highest and most profound form of theory. They believed that the path to the unification of theory and practice, of language and activity, of understanding and life, lay in a greater distancing from metaphysical speculation and a closer approach to common sense.

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The roots of modern philosophical hermeneutics lie in the ancient concept of ἑρμηνεύειν and the medieval interpretations of religious texts made by Jewish and Christian philosophers. But while the important influence of the Stoic relationship between a word and its meaning or between expression and sense on the development of the hermeneutical and religious tradition is widely acknowledged. By contrast, the significance of the meaning of skepticism has received less attention. Discussions of modern, post-Enlightenment perceptions of religion, tend to address as separate topics the concept of Jewish skepticism, Feuerbach's critique of the principles of Christianity and the principles of the Western religious tradition as such, and the history of hermeneutical theories. The influence of philosophers who applied the skeptical approach and practical wisdom in the modern understanding of religion remain somewhat

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neglected in studies of the subject, with a far greater academic interest focusing instead on Gadamer's and Habermas' hermeneutics. This is also the case with Moses Mendelssohn, perhaps one of the most important German Jewish philosophers of the modern era, and Ludwig Feuerbach, a fierce critic of religious dogmatism.

The majority of authors treat Mendelsohn as one the most significant figures of the European Enlightenment, especially in terms of his struggle for rationality,[1] while others have analyzed Mendelsohn's defense of common sense against the metaphysical argumentation of his contemporaries.[2] In his paper, *The Ground Floor of Judaism: Scepticism and Certainty in Moses Mendelssohn's Jerusalem*,[3] Ze'ev Strauss offered an in-depth examination of Mendelsohn's unintended skepticism based on his understanding and usage of the concept of common sense. Feuerbach has been perceived variously as a materialist philosopher due to his emphasis on corporeity,[4] as a philosopher of sensibility due to his insistence on senses and emotions,[5] and as a harsh critic of Christianity, with some authors even considering him as the father of modern atheism, even though Feuerbach himself rejected this characterization throughout his life. Feuerbach's contribution to the modern understanding of

1 See Michael Morgan, "Mendelssohn's Defense of Reason in Jerusalem," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, vol. 38, no. 4, 1989, pp. 449–459; David Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1996; Francesco Tomasoni, "Kant and Mendelssohn: A Singular Alliance in the Name of Reason," *History of European Ideas*, vol. 30, 2004, pp. 267–294.

2 See George Di Giovanni, "Hume, Jacobi, and Common Sense: An Episode in the Reception of Hume in Germany at the Time of Kant," *Kant-Studien*, vol. 89, no. 1, 1998, pp. 44–58; Anton Hutter, *Moses Mendelssohn: Philosophie zwischen gemeinen Menschenverstand und unnutzer Spekulation*, Cuxhaven: Junghans-Verlag 1990; Paul Franks, "Divided by Common Sense: Mendelssohn and Jacobi on Reason and Inferential Justification," in *Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysics and Aesthetics*, ed. by Rachel Munk, Dordrecht: Springer 2011 (*Studies in German Idealism*, vol 13), pp. 203–225.

3 See Ze'ev Strauss, "The Ground Floor of Judaism: Scepticism and Certainty in Moses Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies*, ed. by Bill Rebiger, Berlin: DeGruyter 2018, pp. 179–206.

4 Even Terry Eagleton is reluctant to perceive Feuerbach as a predominantly materialist philosopher, at least not in the Marxist sense of materialism. See Terry Eagleton, *Materialism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2016, p. 36.

5 See Ursula Reitemeyer, *Philosophie der Leiblichkeit. Ludwig Feuerbachs Entwurf einer Philosophie der Zukunft*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1988; Ursula Reitemeyer, "Apotheose der Sinnlichkeit?," in Hans-Jürg Braun, Hans-Martin Sass, Werner Schuffenhauer, Francesco Tomasoni, *Ludwig Feuerbach und die Philosophie der Zukunft* (eds.), Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1998, pp. 259–284; Ursula Reitemeyer, "Der entleibte Mensch. Ludwig Feuerbachs Kritik der identitätslosen Moderne," in *Jahresberichte für deutsche Geschichte*, Berlin: Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften 2007, pp. 159–169.

religion remains a subject of debate; while some authors support his perspectives,[6] especially the idea of abandoning theology in favor of anthropology, others are somewhat critical,[7] questioning the potential of his new approach to religion.

Regardless of these differing opinions, Feuerbach's perspective is important not only in terms of the questions it poses about the sense of religion in general, which contrasts with Marx's approach through its strictly positive formulation, and also in the significance which it ascribes to the instability and versatility of the image. Feuerbach sees a fluid and incomplete definition of the human being as a necessary preunderstanding for any sort of religious theory and practice throughout human history. The significance of the contributions of Gadamer and Habermas to the modern understanding of religion is beyond doubt.[8] Although modern philosophical hermeneutics is based on the tradition of ancient Greek dialectics and the medieval interpretation of biblical texts, it has formed the basis of a common platform for communication, in which people can talk to each other and reach a mutual understanding, regardless of their religious convictions or lack thereof. Gadamer's work strove to reconcile the theological aspect of religion based on faith with the philosophical and scientific aspect based on rational argumentation and anthropological research.[9] The writings of Habermas aimed to translate theological concepts into secular language,[10] thereby enabling a dialogue between religious and non-religious elements of society.[11]

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6 See Gabriel Amengual, "Zu einer begrifflichen Bestimmung der Solidarität," in *Kirche und Theologie im kulturellen Dialog, Für Peter Hünermann,* ed. by Bernhard Fraling, Helmut Hoping, Juan Carlos Scannone, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder 1994, pp. 237–254.

7 See Jon Stewart, "Feuerbach's Conception of Theology or Philosophy of Religion as Anthropology," in *Modern and Postmodern Crises of Symbolic Structures: Essays in Philosophical Anthropology*, ed. by Peter Šajda, Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi 2021 (*Value Inquiry Book Series*, vol. 356), pp. 79–92.

8 See Jessica Frazier, *Gadamer on Religion*, New York: Routledge 2018.

9 See Muhammad Akram, "Beyond Dichotomies: The Import of Gadamer's Hermeneutics for the Debate of Relationship between Theology and Religious Studies," *Islamic Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2013, pp. 137–153. See also David Vessey, "Hans-Georg Gadamer and the Philosophy of Religion," *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 5, no. 8, 2010, pp. 645–655.

10 See Peter E. Gordon, *Migrants in the Profane: Critical Theory and the Question of Secularization*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2020, p. xi.

11 The literature on Habermas and religion in the public sphere is extensive; for more, see, for example, the collected volume edited by Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, *Habermas and Religion*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2013. See also James W. Boettcher, "Habermas, Religion and the Ethics of Citizenship," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 35, nos. 1–2, 2009, pp. 215–238. Melinda Yates, "Rawls and Habermas on Religion in the Public Sphere," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 33, no. 7, 2007, pp. 880–891.

All four authors have been studied individually as typical representatives of their respective historical periods (the Enlightenment, the Haskalah, Neo-Hegelianism and Philosophical Hermeneutics) or from the perspective of the problems which they examined (reason, understanding, corporeity, idolatry, etc.). They have also been studied by means of comparisons with their contemporaries such as Jacobi, Lessing, Kant, Hegel, Marx, or Heidegger. However, to date, none of the four thinkers has been studied in terms of the interrelationship of their philosophies and within the wider and more general context of modern understandings of religion based upon common sense. Starting with Mendelssohn in the Enlightenment and moving on to the time after German Idealism before concluding with twentieth century philosophical hermeneutics, we will see how the skeptical interpretations, which these four philosophers from different historical and religious backgrounds reached, concerning their own religious traditions created a new, wider context for understanding religion in general. This will show how all four thinkers made comparable contributions to the modern understanding of religion.

This paper will examine the influence of Mendelssohn's theory of language and his skeptical, largely common sense-based understanding of meaning and interpretation on the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Habermas, focusing primarily on Mendelssohn's Über *die Sprache*, *Jerusalem oder* über *die religiöse Macht und Judentum* but also on other works from his *Gesammelte Schriften*.[12] A series of Feuerbach's works will also be examined in this light, *Das Wesen des Christetums*, *Das Wesen der Religion*, *Die Grundrisse der Philosophie der Zunkunft*, *Vorlesungen* über *das Wesen der Religion* and a number of his later works which complement the theories outlined in these four earlier studies.[13]

Javier Aguirre, "Jürgen Habermas y la religión en la esfera pública," *Ideas y Valores*, vol. 61, no. 148, 2012, pp. 59–78. José María Mardones, *El discurso religioso de la modernidad: Habermas y la religión*, Barcelona: Anthropos 1998. Nicolas Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006. Camil Ungureanu and Paolo Monti, "Habermas on Religion and Democracy: Critical Perspectives," *The European Legacy*, vol. 22, no. 5, 2017, pp. 521–527.

12 For example, Moses Mendelsohn, *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes*, in *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, vol. 3, ed. by Alexander Altmann, Ismar Elbogen, Julius Guttmann, Eugen Mittwoch, Eva J. Engel and Daniel Krochmalnik, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog 1972. (This work is the continuation of edition by Fritz Bamberger, H. Borodianski (Bar-Dayan), Simon Rawidowicz, Bruno Strauss, L. Strauss und Werner Weinberg, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1929–1938). Also Moses Mendelsohn, "Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele," in *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, vol. 3.

13 Ludwig Feuerbach, "Die Unsterblichkeitsfrage vom Standpunkt der Anthropologie" [1846], in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol 10, ed. by W. Schuffenhauer, Berlin: Akademie Verlag

All of Gadamer's philosophical work should perhaps be considered as a single voluminous reflection on the topic of common sense, but for the sake of brevity this paper will focus on the core of Gadamer's hermeneutical theory as formulated in the two volumes of *Truth and Method* and some other texts on Plato, practical wisdom and the truth of an artwork.[14]

Habermas' theory of communicative action addresses some of the most important themes of contemporary civil society, specifically the impact of Protestantism and the Protestant ethic on modern society and the issue of the secularization and de-secularization of society from the post-Enlightenment period to the present day. One of the key issues in the philosophy of Habermas is the question of whether modern and post-modern secular democratic civil societies have been or are still capable of drawing their values, moral rules and laws from their own non-religious, non-transcendental and non-metaphysical resources. If so, then one of these sources might by represented precisely by practical wisdom, namely common sense. In an effort to verify this hypothesis, the paper will offer an analysis of selected works by Habermas, namely *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns 1*, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns 2*, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion* and the well-known debate between Habermas and Josef Ratziger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) that took place in 2004 at the Catholic Academy of Bavaria and which was subsequently published in 2005 under the title *Dialektik der Säkularisierung.*[15]

The aim of this paper is to compare the philosophical approaches to a word and the object that it describes, to a concept and its meaning, to language and interpretation. This will help both to clarify the thinking of Mendelssohn, Feuerbach, Gadamer and Habermas, four philosophers whose philosophies are based on common sense, and to identify clearly the skeptical dimension of the modern philosophical approach to religion, demonstrating the value of this dimension to contemporary religious theory and practice.

These aims will be achieved through an examination of the argumentation of Mendelssohn's and Feuerbach's skepticism and Gadamer's and Habermas' hermeneutical philosophy, which I will analyze within the context of the

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1964ff.; Also: "Über Spiritualismus und Materialismus, besonders in Beziehung auf die Willensfreiheit" [1866], in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol 11, ed. by W. Schuffenhauer, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1981.

14 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Platos dialektische Ethik," *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, *Griechische Philosophie I*, Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck 1985. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Praktisches Wissen," *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, *Griechische Philosophie I*. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Unterwegs zur Schrift," *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, *Plato im Dialog*, Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck 1991.

15 Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung*, Freiburg am Breisgau: Herder 2005, pp. 34–36.

German Christian and Jewish hermeneutical traditions. I will further consider them in relation to Plato's dialectics, the ontological character of meaning, the similarities between the ceremonial law and the truth of an artwork, and the specific relation between theory and practice. An exploration of these issues across the work of all four philosophers should provide a profound examination of the *concept of common sense* in their respective systems of thought, accentuating its importance in reading, translation, interpretation, and in any sort of communicative action, both within and outside the religious context.

1 Rehabilitation of Pre-understanding and Prejudice as a Result of the Skeptical Approach

Before embarking on the topic, it would be useful to clarify some further details on the question of skepticism. As we delve more deeply into the history of skepticism in Western thought, a number of questions tend to arise. How do we define the skeptical approach and the ancient Greek or the modern skeptical tradition? What have we gained from both ancient skepticism and the skeptical tradition? Why do accounts of our own religious tradition emphasize the influence of the philosophy of Stoicism at the expense of an acknowledgment of the significance of the skeptical approach? Why is a healthy dose of skepticism crucial for an appropriate understanding of religion? In answer to the first of these questions, by skepticism we mean both approaches: the ancient Greek, mostly Pyrrhonean school of thought but also the modern skeptical tradition represented by thinkers such as Descartes, Hume, Bacon, Montaigne, and Nietzsche. The ancient skeptical approach is founded on the principle of the constant need to question everything that we believe in, to test our faith regularly, and to avoid making judgements. Since we can never be sufficiently sure of the object of our judgement, any sort of judgmental behavior should be considered as counterproductive.

The Western Judeo-Christian religious tradition was built mainly on the principals of ancient Stoicism since this approach, the predominant philosophy in the Roman world, especially in the later years of the Empire, seemed to offer the most effective strategy for surviving the political insecurity of the period and the oppression of certain social and religious groups by the imperial authorities. Stoicism remained the predominant position until the early Middle Ages when rival schools of thought such as Epicureanism and different forms of skepticism came to the fore in intellectual and religious life. With the emergence of Christian dogma, which denied the possibility of doubt, Stoics and early Christians alike saw the teachings of Epicurus as pure hedonism, an

object of disregard and contempt often subject to misinterpretation and outright prejudice. However, this attitude changed with the arrival of the modern era in the Enlightenment period, in which a reliance on doubt, rational argumentation, empirical investigations, and the effort to verify every significant statement gradually brought about a definitive end to earlier understandings of religion. As Western societies started to undergo the process of secularization, the religious tradition and religious faith became an object of doubt, and the emancipation of previously disenfranchised religious groups established a solid foundation for the subsequent emergence of religious pluralism.

In the atmosphere of social change in Europe,[16] perhaps the most important representative of the Jewish Enlightenment, better known as the Haskalah, Moses Mendelsohn, formulated his new understanding of religion in his 1782 work *Jerusalem. Religious Power and Judaism* (*Jerusalem oder* über *religiöse Macht und Judentum*).[17] As Ze'ev Strauss has argued, "the Jewish intellectual tradition can be understood as a constant interplay between scepticism and dogmatism."[18] Nonetheless, Mendelssohn's work represents a substantial development from the writings of his philosophical predecessors. Mendelssohn's own skepticism was in fact unintentional,[19] and, as Strauss notes, "the idea of philosophical doubt has led Mendelssohn—in contrast to the aforementioned Jewish thinkers—in a completely different direction."[20] Strauss goes on to argue that Mendelsohn's unintended skepticism led him to doubt the nature of Judaism as a revealed religion, suggesting instead that it could be perceived as a religion of revealed legislation.[21] This skeptical approach of Mendelsohn is not directed against the core of Judaism *per se*, but rather against the dogmatism of revealed religion and misunderstandings that can be

16 See Marek Stachoň, "Enlightenment and Social Progress: Back to the Enlightenment," *Studia z Historii Filozofii*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2021, pp. 43–63.

17 Moses Mendelsohn, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, vol. 8, 1983. All quotations of the work in this paper are taken from the translation by Alan Arkush: Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem: Religious Power and Judaism,* trans. by Alan Arkush, ed. by Alexander Altmann, Waltham: Brandeis University Press 1983.

18 Strauss, "The Ground Floor of Judaism: Scepticism and Certainty in Moses Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," pp. 179–180.

19 Strauss offers several examples of Mendelssohn's negative relationship to skepticism in his writings (for example, in *Jerusalem*, *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen* über *das Daseyn Gottes*). Mendelson ranked skepticism with atheism, superstition, and infatuation as illnesses of the soul (*Seelenkrankheit*). See Ze'ev Strauss, "The Ground Floor of Judaism: Scepticism and Certainty in Moses Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," p. 180.

20 Ibid., p. 181.

21 Ibid., p. 180. See also Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, pp. 89–92.

caused by the incorrect use of language.[22] On this basis, the true spirit of Judaism can only be brought into the light by elaborating the true meaning of the words of scripture; in order to do so, common sense must replace metaphysical speculation. This line of argumentation leads us directly to Ludwig Feuerbach, a philosopher who would later apply the same skeptical approach to point to the unsustainability of Christian dogmas.

Mendelsohn and Feuerbach shared the same motivation in opening the discussion of religion. Both philosophers were motivated by the newly developed relationship between religious institutions and the modern state which lacked an established state religion, both in the hope of a potentially secular (but non-atheist) civil society, where the citizens of all faiths could be treated equally. Therefore, while Feuerbach's anthropology based on Christian skepticism is inherently political, it differs from the philosophy of Marx and Engels which created a new political ideology. Feuerbach's focus remained the concrete, corporal human being, the citizen of the modern *polis*; his anti-speculative perspective perceives the human as a balanced, sensually rational, and hence complete and complex creature who, together with other humans, has the capacity to decide and establish his own future in the modern state.

Feuerbach's critique of the Christian image of God as a human without a body, which he considers to be a form of idolatry and anthropocentrism, clearly suggests that his approach to religion should not be seen as atheistic,[23] but rather as an anthropological explanation of religious motivation and an attempt to translate religious content into secular language, which offers a far more efficient explanation of theological pre-understanding. This is something that is shared by Feuerbach and Habermas, both of whom remain faithful to the heritage of the Enlightenment, regardless of their differing intentions on some points. Habermas wants to prove the rational basis of the institutions of the state and of the church in order to attribute equal significance and recognition to both secular and religious citizens within the modern state. In his *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas intends to exchange prejudice for pre-understanding to enable a rational dialogue between two seemingly

22 Strauss, "The Ground Floor of Judaism: Scepticism and Certainty in Moses Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," p. 181.

23 Despite his repeated denials, Feuerbach was accused of being an atheist throughout his life, and the imputation persisted even after his death. In *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, Feuerbach uses the example of Spinoza to show how easily one can be called an atheist and to demonstrate the fluidity and dynamism of the religious tradition and its interpretation. See Ludwig Feuerbach, *Vorlesungen über das Das Wesen der Religion*, ed. by Wilhelm Bolin, Stuttgart: Fr. Frommanns Verlag 1908, p. 29.

opposed sides.[24] Feuerbach, by contrast, goes beyond rationality and, in a similar approach to that of Damasio,[25] attempts to identify the feelings and emotions that lie behind the political and religious motivations of human beings, although his thinking lacks access to the specific insights that subsequent developments in modern psychiatry and neuroscience would later offer. As a result, Feuerbach does not see religious and secular lifestyles as alternatives and instead explores them solely from the perspective of their anthropological origins and their real or potential impact on the life of an individual or society as a whole.

Gadamer's work includes almost no explicitly formulated attitude towards skepticism, nor can we see any direct influence of it in his thinking, but a skeptical approach based on the reconsideration of pre-understanding and prejudice is nonetheless consistently present in his hermeneutical philosophy. Gadamer notes that a degree of healthy doubt and additional knowledge is essential for enabling us to identify whether we hold a pre-understanding that helps to facilitate understanding or a prejudice that can lead to misunderstanding:

> What appears to be a limiting prejudice from the viewpoint of the absolute self-construction of reason in fact belongs to historical reality itself. If we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices. Thus we can formulate the fundamental epistemological question for a truly historical hermeneutics as follows: what is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from the countless others, which it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome.[26]

However, despite the complexity and versatility of the hermeneutical process, Gadamer does not disavow the possibility of the reasonable and adequate interpretation of written or spoken texts. In his approach to the rehabilitation of prejudice he encourages us to stick firmly to our religious and cultural

24 See Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns, Bd. 1. Handlungsrealität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2019, pp. 279–298. See also Jürgen Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2013, pp. 15–84, pp. 216–257.

25 See Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, New York: Vintage 2000. See also Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, New York: Random House 2008.

26 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, London, New York: Continuum 2004, p. 278.

tradition, but also to reconsider the content of our tradition and our faith with the aim of granting it a new, more contemporary meaning. For Mendelssohn, Feuerbach, Gadamer and Habermas, the skeptical approach does not lead to uncertainty and instability, but rather to the emergence of a more appropriate way of understanding.

2 Plato's Dialectics as an Inspiration for Mendelssohn, Feuerbach, Gadamer and Habermas

The Czech philosopher and communication and art theorist Vilém Flusser has offered a thought-provoking analysis of the differences between the understanding and the practice of dialogue in the ancient Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions.[27] Flusser argues that while ancient Greek dialogue has a mainly epistemological character and aims to reach truth and knowledge without *doxa*, dialogue in the Judeo-Christian tradition is focused more on *intersubjectivity*, the knowledge about a concrete I reflected in the other, which is in turn represented through the concrete You. He also distinguishes between Judeo-Christian ontology and Greek metaphysics, emphasizing the fact that Christianity did not initially spread across the Roman Empire and Europe as theology but instead as a religion of love for one's neighbor. However, even if Greek dialogue endeavors to strengthen knowledge and Judeo-Christian dialogue to strengthen the intersubjective relationship, the application of the principles of ethics during the process of discussion and the commitment to acknowledge all participants in the dialogue remain the same in both cases. All four authors whose contributions to the modern understanding of religion are examined in this paper applied mixed perspectives on dialogue in their teachings, but far and away the most obvious practitioner of the Judeo-Christian form of dialogue is, somewhat surprisingly, Feuerbach, perhaps the most vociferous critic of Christianity.

Feuerbach, Gadamer and Habermas perceive written text and spoken language as equal, yet in terms of their universal legacy, Mendelssohn prefers the spoken word, noting that this was the approach which Plato tells us was employed by Socrates in his dialogues with his contemporaries.[28] This belief

27 Vilém Flusser, *Komunikológia*, trans. by Alma Münzová, Bratislava: Media Institut 2002, p. 206. Originally published in German: Vilém Flusser, *Kommunikologie*, Mannheim: Bollmann Verlag 1996.

28 Strauss, "The Ground Floor of Judaism: Scepticism and Certainty in Moses Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," pp. 191–192.

was one of the reasons why Mendelssohn was called the Jewish Socrates. Mendelssohn not only favored the spoken language due to his lack of belief in conceptual progress in religious and artistic texts and his awareness of the multiplicity of possible meanings of one and the same word across different historical periods,[29] but also and mainly because he did not believe that the written text enables us to perform a genuine intersubjective dialogue. True knowledge, especially in religion and morality, can never be obtained from text alone, but only via the intersubjective relationship. Mendelssohn writes,

> Everything is dead letter; the spirit of living conversation has vanished. We express our love and anger in letters, quarrel and become reconciled in letters; all our personal relations are by correspondence; and when we get together, we know of no other entertainment than playing or reading aloud. Hence, it has come to pass that man has almost lost his value for his fellow man. Intercourse with the wise man is not sought, for we find his wisdom in writings. All we do is encourage him to write, in case we should believe he has not yet published enough... This was not the case in the bygone days of ancient times. Even though one cannot say that they were better, they were certainly different. One drew from different sources, one gathered and preserved in different vessels; and one made one's own that which had been preserved by completely different means. Man was more necessary to man; teaching was more closely connected with life, contemplation more intimately bound up with action. The inexperienced man had to follow in the footsteps of the experienced, the student in those of his teacher; he had to seek his company, to observe him and, as it were, sound him out, if he wanted to satisfy his thirst for knowledge.[30]

For Feuerbach, dialogue possesses its proper meaning only in so far as it becomes an expression of an intersubjective relation. Therefore, the knowledge which is gained in and through a dialogue is not an abstract, metaphysical truth but rather what Feuerbach calls *sensual cognition* (*das sinnliche Erkenntnis*). Sensual cognition is defined as a special sort of knowledge that should not be confused with sensual perception.[31] Sensual cognition is a restored polarity between the concrete, corporal I and the concrete, corporal You, a polarity

29 Ibid., p. 190.

30 Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, pp. 103–104.

31 See Ludwig Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft und andere Schriften*, ed. by Michael Holzinger, Berlin: Holzinger 2016, § 32.

that is called love.[32] The result of sensual cognition, just like the result of any properly conducted dialogue, is the mutual recognition of each participant as an equal and independent subject and an assurance that as long as there is a human, there is a God,[33] and that as long as there is dialogue, there is religion.

In the hermeneutics of Gadamer, which is greatly influenced by Plato's dialectics, the question has a dialectical character; it presents several options, and the variety of potential answers arises from the substance of the question itself. Gadamer's understanding of dialogue is broader than that held by Mendelssohn and Feuerbach; in addition to communication between persons, it also embraces the reading of the written text, translation and interpretation from one language into another, the sensual perception of a work of art, and the participation in religious rituals. All these activities have a dialogical character because they represent communication between the author and the reader (or listener, viewer, etc.) based on the effort to communicate and to understand the universal legacy of each individual work to the greatest possible degree. The dimension of truth in Gadamerian hermeneutics appears in the close relationship between the question and understanding. The hermeneutic priority of the question is an articulation of the openness of one I towards another.[34] Gadamer explains,

> It too has a real analogue in the I's experience of the Thou. In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another.[35]

Habermas' theory of communicative activity sees the openness of one I towards another together with the effort to establish a common rational ground as the main presupposition for successful inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in the modern democratic secular society.[36] However, Habermas does not attribute the same amount of responsibility for the effectivity of the dialogue to

32 Ibid., § 33.
33 Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, Cologne: Anaconda Verlag 2014, p. 65.
34 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 355.
35 Ibid.
36 Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, pp. 15–27

both sides; he believes that secular citizens bear the greater responsibility for the secularization of society and for the subsequent disappearance of the religious discourse from the public debates,[37] and they should therefore take the leading role in translating religious and theological concepts into rational, secular language, thereby enabling dialogue between religious and non-religious citizens in a society.[38] The necessary conditions for the creation of this common, rational basis and the limitations of this well-intentioned rationality will be addressed in the following pages, but it is clear at this point that Mendelssohn, Feuerbach, Gadamer, and Habermas are all deeply convinced that the real function of language can be revealed in dialogues between persons.

3 The Ontological Character of Meaning

The issue of the word and its meaning is crucial to the thinking of Mendelssohn, Feuerbach, Gadamer and Habermas, with all four philosophers arguing that meaning has an ontological character. The traditions that have formed our specific nature of being and our specific attitude towards being in general is transmitted through the language which we use, and therefore understanding becomes a question of existence. However, the approaches to language taken by the four philosophers do vary to some extent. Mendelssohn and Feuerbach offer different criticisms of Scripture; while Mendelssohn is mainly critical of Christian dogmatism and aims to avoid the same type of dogmatism in Judaism, Feuerbach perceives both Judaism and Christianity as expressions of the theist attempt to overcome human mortality and the dependence on nature through the invention of God, an omnipotent human without a body. Similarly, Mendelsohn perceives natural religions as archetypal examples of idolatry, but Feuerbach instead sees them as representing the natural state of the human, a state in which he can live as a *natural creature* (*Naturwesen*) freed from the division of body and mind. But the two thinkers' perceptions of the relationship between the word and its meaning and their disagreement with the statement that Scripture contains the formulation of an eternal truth are very similar. It is on this basis that Mendelssohn rejects the written text with all its rigidity and prefers the more flexible format of the spoken word that is much less restricted through the historical conscience.[39] Feuerbach writes,

37 Habermas and Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung*, pp. 34–36.
38 Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns 1*, pp. 297–298.
39 Mendelson, *Jerusalem*, pp. 103–104.

> And such derivation of Nature or the universe from God is therefore in this respect nothing but the derivation of the real essence of Nature, as it appears to our senses, from her abstract, imagined essence, which exists only in our idea—a derivation which appears to be reasonable because in the act of thinking we are accustomed to consider the abstract and general as that which is nearer to thought….In reality, where everything passes on naturally, the copy follows the original, the image the thing which it represents, the thought its object—but on the supernatural, miraculous ground of theology, the original follows the copy, the thing its own likeness. "It is strange" says St. Augustine, "but nevertheless true, that this world could not exist if it was not known to God." That means: the world is known and thought before it exists; nay, it *exists* only *because* it was thought of—the existence is a consequence of the knowledge or of the act of thinking, the original a consequence of the copy, the object a consequence of its likeness.[40]

Concepts and signs were, according to Mendelsohn and Feuerbach, developed by humans to name and express external impressions; they should, especially in their written form, be perceived as images of the spoken words. Both philosophers emphasize and criticize the idolatry of Scripture, with both agreeing on the fact that it is incapable of possessing eternal truth. Mendelssohn attributes this to the fact that eternal truth cannot be depicted in images,[41] in the case of Feuerbach because neither the word nor the idea can be formed without empirical experience of reality.

As Gadamer argues in *Truth and Method*, language is a medium of our hermeneutical experience,[42] and our hermeneutical experience shapes our way of being in the world. In contrast to Mendelsohn's and Feuerbach's assertions that religious texts are incapable of conveying eternal metaphysical truth, or to Mendelsohn's and Habermas' attempts to identify a common rational platform for religious and non-religious citizens in a civil society, Gadamer presents the task of his philosophical hermeneutics as the recognition and rehabilitation of religious discourse itself. Unlike Mendelsohn, he argues in favor of the written text which, in his opinion, is accessible across the generations and which can be handed down more easily than traditions transmitted via the spoken

40 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*, trans. by Alexander Loos, New York: Prometheus Books 2004, § 24.

41 Mendelson, *Jerusalem*, pp. 104–107. See also Strauss, "The Ground Floor of Judaism: Scepticism and Certainty in Moses Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," pp. 191–192.

42 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 387.

word.[43] Nonetheless, Gadamer does not draw a strict line between religious faith as a way of being and understanding the world and religious theory that is intended to understand and explain a religion to the wider audience and present it as one possible discourse with its own claim to discover and to communicate the truth in a manner similar to that of a work of art.

4 Ceremonial Law and the Truth of an Artwork

While a superficial understanding of Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment philosophies of religion might suggest that they intended to reject religion itself as a relic of the irrational past or to create an entirely new, rationally grounded sort of religious spirituality, there is in fact little truth in such an interpretation. Feuerbach's encouragement to practice the love for one's neighbor, Mendelsohn's understanding of ceremonial law,[44] Gadamer's attitude towards the truth of an artwork, and Habermas' practice of mutual recognition in communicative activity are all closely related to the concept of *common sense*, a term which has changed much in meaning throughout history. None of the four philosophers doubts either the significance of religion in human life, nor do they attempt to develop a merely rational argumentation in favor of religion as such. They instead point to two non-metaphysical dimensions of religion, which even after the advent of Enlightenment rationality and the epistemological dominance of the modern natural sciences remain unshakable: the *aesthetic dimension* and the dimension of *practical wisdom* or *common sense.*

The loss of the original meaning of the concept of *common sense* has led to such a reduction in its cognitive function that aesthetic judgment, even if based on practical wisdom, has been relegated to the level of a question of knowledge, purely a matter of taste devoid of any epistemological value.[45] The reduction of *common sense* to a purely aesthetic function is clearly a mistake because it fails to appreciate the rational ground of metaphors and rituals in ceremonial law (Mendelssohn), sensual cognition (Feuerbach), or a universal ethical platform (Habermas) as much as the cognitive value of a work of art (Gadamer). As was mentioned above, the Gadamerian understanding of the truth of an artwork is very broad, encompassing religious ceremonies and rituals in addition to visual art, music, drama, literature, and poetry.

43 Ibid., pp. 391–392.

44 See Strauss, "The Ground Floor of Judaism: Scepticism and Certainty in Moses Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," pp. 193–197.

45 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 1–3.

Mendelssohn believed that ceremonial law, like art and its specific articulation of truth, should not become an object of logical analysis; above all, he insisted, it should be lived. This represents a marked contradiction to the commonly heard criticism of Judaism that it is little more than a compendium of joyless and spiritless laws and ceremonies.[46] Ceremonial law plays the same role in Mendelssohn's philosophy which tradition plays in Gadamer's hermeneutics; it is both rational and dynamic. By rationality, Gadamer and Mendelsohn do not mean the power of abstract reason, but rather practical wisdom based on common sense: "I must allow tradition's claim to validity, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me."[47] This understanding of religion not only supports the rational and practical function of post-Enlightenment religion, but it also abandons any opposition to the aesthetic function of religious texts and artworks. Mendelsohn writes,

> To say it briefly: I believe that Judaism knows of no revealed religion in the sense in which Christians understand this term. The Israelites possess a divine *legislation*—laws, commandments, ordinances, rules of life, instruction in the will of God as to how they should conduct themselves in order to attain temporal and eternal felicity. Propositions and prescriptions of this kind were revealed to them by Moses in a miraculous and supernatural manner, but no doctrinal opinions, no saving truths, no universal propositions of reason. These the Eternal reveals to us and to all other men, at all times, through *nature* and *thing*, but never through *word* and *script*.[48]

For this reason, Mendelsohn, like Feuerbach, distinguishes between Nature and God, between morality and religion.[49] In Mendelssohn's understanding, Judaism differs from revealed religion in the fact that God and nature, philosophy and religion or science and art are not contradictory forces, but instead support each other in the effort to reach a more appropriate formulation of the

46 Strauss is pointing here at Leibniz, Wolff, and Corrodi, but we can find the same sort of criticisms in Hegel's *Early Theological Writings*. See Strauss, "The Ground Floor of Judaism: Scepticism and Certainty in Moses Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," p. 196. and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke I. Frühe Schriften*, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1986, pp. 274–296.

47 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 355.

48 Mendelson, *Jerusalem*, p. 90.

49 See ibid., p. 17. This differentiation appears in most of Feuerbach's texts relating to religion and anthropology, for example, *The Essence of Christianity*, *The Essence of Religion*, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* and in the *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*.

truth based on common sense and with a wider applicability in everyday life. Although Scripture is not considered to be a source of eternal metaphysical truth in the thinking of Mendelsohn, Feuerbach, Gadamer, and Habermas, it does retain an aesthetic value and is therefore able to articulate the truth of an artwork with its own universal legacy and hermeneutical value.

5 Theory and Practice

Gadamer, Habermas, Feuerbach, and Mendelssohn all refuse to divide knowledge into theory and practice, as suggested by revealed theist religions or by the modern natural sciences. They also express doubt about the idea that speculation is a reliable source of knowledge, seeing practice as the highest and most profound form of theory. Before addressing the key problem of the relationship of theory and practice in the modern understanding of religion, we must first clarify our starting point for these further reflections. Before the process of secularization began, the dichotomies of religious and secular worldviews, lifestyles or practices did not and could not exist. There was a single official religion and an individual's religious denomination depended on the locality in which they lived. A secular perspective in and of itself was justifiable grounds for punishment and subsequent ostracization from the local community. Society initially began to undergo secularization in years after the Enlightenment, and approximately two centuries later, two different worldviews and lifestyles, the religious and the secular one, had emerged. Now, for the question of religious theory and practice, it is important to determine whether we are considering religious and the nonreligious lifestyles as two opposing constellations and alternatives, as Habermas does, or if we prefer to choose the path suggested by Feuerbach and consider both religious and secular attitudes as equally motivated by the essence of humanity. Each of these perspectives brings about its own distinct set of consequences.

In his two-volume work *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas dedicates several chapters to the phenomenon of the demythologization of the world (*Entzauberung der Welt*). In the four chapters, "Strukturelle Aspekte: Entzauberung und systematische Durchgestaltung," "Entzauberung und modernes Weltverständnis," "Modernisierung als gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung,"[50] and "Einige Merkmale des mythischen und des modernen Weltverständnisses,"[51] he examines the post-Enlightenment transition from the

50 Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, vol. 1, pp. 279–308.
51 Ibid., pp. 44–71.

mythological worldview of revealed religion towards modern rationality. Feuerbach, by contrast, sees no difference between the revealed theist religions and the rationality of modern science. In his opinion, the creation and establishment of the modern natural sciences does not mean the end of the theist approach to humanity, nature, and the world, but rather its continuation. According to Feuerbach, theist religions and modern natural sciences have their origin in the same anthropological motivation, the fear of human dependence on nature.[52] The creation of God in the image of a human without a body that would stand above nature has certain parallels with the belief in abstract reason that enables humankind to stand above nature in a similarly godlike manner. The theist and scientific approaches merely represent two sides of the same coin in their shared goal, the emancipation from reliance on nature. However, even in terms of religion, the human being is a natural creature and a practitioner; he wants to live his life and practice his religion in harmony with nature and other natural creations. Feuerbach explains,

> If we reduce the world or Nature to a totality of abstract qualities, to a metaphysical, i.e. to a merely imagined object, and consider this abstract world as the real world, then it is a logical necessity to consider it as finite. The world is not given to us through the act of thinking, not at least through the metaphysical and hyperphysical thinking which abstracts from the real world and founds its true and highest existence upon such abstraction—the world is given to us through life, by perception, by the senses. For an abstract being which only thinks there exists no light, because it has no eyes, no warmth, because it has no feeling, in general no world because it has no organ for its perception; for such a being there exists in reality nothing. The world, therefore, exists for us only because we are no logical or metaphysical physical beings, because we are other beings, because we are more than mere logicians and metaphysicians.[53]

When Gadamer and Habermas describe practice as the most profound form of theory, they are revealing the significant inspiration which Aristotle and his practical philosophy exerted upon them.[54] Likewise, Mendelssohn does not

52 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*, § 2–3.

53 Ibid., § 25.

54 See Richard J. Bernstein, "The Constellation of Hermeneutics, Critical Theory and Deconstruction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. by Robert J. Dostal, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002, p. 269. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die sokratische Frage und Aristoteles," in *Gesammelte Werke,* vol. 7, *Plato im Dialog*, Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck

see Judaism as "a set of theoretical beliefs,"[55] but rather as a constant dialectical movement of "teaching and life, wisdom and activity, speculation and sociability."[56] Although the rules in ceremonial law are handed down to humankind by God, they are and should be applied as dynamic and flexible principles of everyday life rather than a collection of rigid, written, literally understood, and reproduced commandments. Even the divine commandments should become an object of interpretation to ensure their best possible application for social practice. The essence of religion is therefore closely related to the essence of what it means to be human, but not to the human in general, but to a concrete, corporal human in contact with his fellow-humans in both his intimate and his extended community. In order to come as close as possible to the best social practice, we need to replace abstract metaphysical reason with the practical wisdom of common sense.

6 Common Sense

For Mendelssohn, Feuerbach, Gadamer, and Habermas, the unification of theory and practice, of language and activity, and of understanding and life means the withdrawal from metaphysical speculation and a closer approximation to common sense. For Feuerbach, humankind is a product of nature, and religion is a product of humankind; therefore, however a human being creates his religion, it will be thus. This does not represent a denial of the religion, but rather a very practical, common sense-based outcome of Feuerbach's anthropology and philosophy of religion. In addition to its other characteristics, Feuerbach sees humankind as a religious creature, and it therefore follows that religion should have a firm place in human life; the presupposition is that religion makes human life on earth richer and happier, which means the life of concrete, corporeal humans. In Gadamerian hermeneutics the concept of common sense (*sensus communis*) is the methodological cornerstone of the human sciences. Gadamer is inspired by the practical wisdom of Aristotle, the Greek term φρόνησις, which is expressed in Latin by the concept of *prudentia* in its original meaning. This concept does not mean rationality *per se*, but rather the capacity to make carefully considered decisions with respect to issues of

1991, p. 378 and Gadamer, "Praktisches Wissen," in *Gesammelte Werke,* vol. 5, *Griechische Philosophie I*, p. 242.

55 Strauss, "The Ground Floor of Judaism: Scepticism and Certainty in Moses Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," p. 182.

56 Mendelson, *Jerusalem*, p. 119–120.

daily life. Common sense is an invaluable tool in the acquisition of knowledge, and its true value lies in the fact that it is impossible to learn the skill; it is instead formed or cultivated, lacking either a precise content or any persisting dogmas. Common sense is based firmly on concrete lived experience, yet it simultaneously transcends experience. Gadamer expresses this in the following manner:

> A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light. It is like the relation between I and Thou. A person who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its moral bond. A person who reflects himself out of a living relationship to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition in exactly the same way. In seeking to understand tradition historical consciousness must not rely on the critical method with which it approaches its sources, as if this preserved it from mixing in its own judgments and prejudices. It must, in fact, think within its own historicity. To be situated within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible.[57]

In the philosophy of Habermas, common sense represents a platform where religious and secular citizens can meet each other and reach an understanding in dialogue with the condition that the non-religious citizens be willing to translate theological concepts into secular language with the help of common sense. Habermas sees the application of common sense in this context as a Pyrrhic translation of the sacred to the secular.[58] But what does this concept of Pyrrhic translation mean? According to Huw Rees, Pyrrhic translation is a rational reconstruction of the dialogical practice and a call for an active engagement of all citizens in the multi-religious society rather than a prescription of certain behavior for religious and non-religious citizens.[59] Habermas' sacred-to-secular-translation is closely linked to his political theory and to the process of post-metaphysical, conceptual, and ethical appropriation.[60]

Huw Rees differs somewhat from Habermas and makes a clear differentiation between conceptual and ethical forms of post-metaphysical appropriation. In

57 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 354.

58 See Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, p. 55. See also Dafydd Huw Rees, *The Postsecular Political Philosophy of Jürgen Habermas: Translating the Sacred*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2018, p. 139, pp. 145–165.

59 Ibid., p. 145.

60 Ibid., p. 158.

his opinion, ethical appropriation can sometimes counteract the conceptual form and vice versa, especially in cases of very divergent groups of people, and this may result in the failure or even the impossibility of translation of certain types of content. This might also apply to sacred-to-secular-translation in cases where both groups of citizens seem to differ fundamentally in their worldviews. However, while this may be valid from the perspective of Habermas and his two alternative worldviews, it seems more questionable from the perspective of Feuerbach and his common anthropological ground for both religious and non-religious approaches to reality. If the essence of religion is closely related to the essence of being human, then reaching a mutual understanding and recognition between religious and secular citizens might appear as a difficult but not impossible task. Mendelssohn's concept of religion, grounded in his concept of ceremonial law as a sum of flexible, dialogical, *ad hoc*, common sense-based rules for ritual and intersubjective practice, validates the significance of practical wisdom in the modern understanding of religion.

7 Conclusion

The Enlightenment and modern secular societies have frequently been blamed for the demise of religion and its gradual disappearance from the public sphere. However, as we have seen, the great social and political changes which societies have undergone since the eighteenth century did not cause the destruction of religion as such, but rather it was in fact the reconstruction of religious content that helped to reformulate the role of religion in society. The loss of the epistemological predominance of the revealed truth followed by the emergence of a more flexible approach to the Scriptural texts, a loss of ecclesiastical political power in favor of the state, the prevalence of intersubjective relations instead of abstract metaphysical spirituality—none of these factors in isolation led to the eclipse of the relevance of religion in society. On the contrary, all these processes contributed to the creation of a more flexible, more dynamic, and more vibrant religious tradition, a tradition that is not averse to doubt in order to maintain its quality and continued existence. A healthy degree of doubt and a plurality of possible interpretations of religious and non-religious texts, established on the questioning capacity of common sense, have been extraordinarily helpful in reaching a true and proper understanding and in grasping the reality within this understanding. Therefore, these approaches have highly significant epistemological, ethical, political, and anthropological consequences. They help to prevent dogmatism in philosophical and religious practice but without abandoning or negating the tradition.

Rooted in the ancient Greek tradition, rediscovered in the Enlightenment and developed further throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the skeptical approach remains extraordinarily helpful and meaningful even in the contemporary era. In the current post-factual society, where easy access to information does not guarantee the facilitation of understanding but instead amplifies the confusion of faith and fact, we see more than ever before the necessity of remaining grounded, communicating with empathy, and applying practical wisdom in our everyday religious and non-religious practices.

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CHAPTER 5

History and Facticity in Kant's Philosophy of Religion

Eduardo Charpenel

Abstract

In the present text, I carry out an analysis of Kant's philosophy of religion that shows to what extent it is informed by fundamental theses and principles of Christianity. In contrast to the readings of interpreters who seek to relegate religion in his thought or to fully secularize it, I intend to show that Kant develops a religion of reason that is informed by and runs parallel to the development of the Christian faith but does not end up discrediting it. On the contrary, what I will emphasize is that the Kantian critical method is forced, in different instances (such as in the discussion of evil, divine grace, the role of Jesus of Nazareth as mankind's savior, and the ethical community), to recognize or admit the possible supernatural transcendence of certain Christian principles—and not only their mere moral worth—and to give a preponderant place to history as a stage of encounter between that which practical reason prescribes and that which comes to meet mankind as part of God's providential plan. In doing so, I intend to point out that Kant offers us an unvaluable intellectual legacy in which the development of a critical philosophy of religion is unthinkable without the permanent dialogue with the concrete forms and manifestations of religious faith.

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In this text, my aim is to analyze the reasons why a strong or radical secularist reading of Kant's philosophy of religion, such as the one that some interpreters have attempted, is not tenable. Although Kant indeed defended and endorsed a religion based on pure practical reason, his understanding of religion depends, in my view, nonetheless, on a particular reading of Christian sacred texts and on the historical effects of the Christian religion. In this sense, I will try to show how Kant's proposal of a rational religion cannot be entirely detached from some Christian dogmatic theses—as some interpreters aim to do so by fully "secularizing" Kant's philosophy of religion—or from the historical facticity that the Christian faith presupposes.

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In the past decades, Kant's philosophy of religion has become an increasingly popular object of discussion among scholars. For a long time, this aspect of his thought was overshadowed by the monumental three *Critiques*. It could be said, in a way, that Kant's reflections on religious matters were not very well received since they were considered, at best, only as a kind of appendix to the critical system. In my view, other reasons that also prevented this access depend on the fact that Kant has long been valued as a particularly contemporary philosopher for our age since he presents and develops an ethics based first and foremost on the self-legislative capacity of reason and not on premises of another kind—specifically speaking, not on premises of a theological dogmatic type. In a time in which, at least in academic philosophy, the link between an ethical project and a religious doctrine has been viewed with suspicion, it is not surprising that Kant's philosophy of religion has often been overlooked. These factors have had a specific external weight, so to speak. But the situation is not entirely mitigated either when one undertakes the task of studying the Kantian texts themselves, for there are elements therein that point to lines of thought that could make plausible the project of transcending religiosity in a conventional sense.

To illustrate this, an emblematic case can be brought to mind. After the publication of his main text on the philosophy of religion, namely *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (henceforth *Religion*),[1] Kant was subjected to Prussian censorship and forbidden to continue writing on such topics since his points of view seemed to contravene fundamental aspects of Christian orthodoxy. Kant played with a certain ambiguity and promised the king not to continue publishing on these topics *during* the latter's reign, but as soon as there was a monarchical succession Kant seized the chance to resume discussions of this subject.[2] In particular, he did so in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, where he reconstructed his censorship polemic. After stating there that his *Religion* was nothing more than a scholarly book intended for a highly specialized reading public, Kant makes the following claims:

1 I will use the following German abbreviations for Kant's texts: *Critique of Pure Reason* (*KrV*); *Critique of Practical Reason* (*KpV*); *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (*Rel.*); *Towards Perpetual Peace* (TPP); and *The Conflict of the Faculties* (SF). The volume and page numbers in my quotations refer to the standard German edition of Kant's works: *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften* (GS) "Akademieausgabe," vols. 1–22, Berlin: Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften; vol. 23, Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin and Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen; vols. 24–29, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin 1900-.

2 See SF in GS, vol. VII, pp. 5–6.

> Since, in the book mentioned, I make no *appraisal* of Christianity, I cannot be guilty of *disparaging* it. In fact, it is only natural religion that I appraise: The only possible occasion for this misunderstanding is the fact that I cite some biblical texts to corroborate certain purely rational teachings in religion. But the late *Michaelis*, who uses the same practice in his moral philosophy, explains that his purpose in doing this is neither to put anything biblical into philosophy nor to draw anything philosophical out of the Bible, but only to clarify and confirm his rational propositions by their real or supposed agreement with the judgments of others (poets, perhaps, and orators).[3]

Based on this passage, things seem to be very clear. Kant cannot be accused of distorting the Christian religion since his object of study is one of a completely different nature, namely, the pure religion of reason. If we take him at face value, he seems to be immune to theological dogmatical criticism of any kind since he would not be speaking in the role of a religious minister or a theologian, but simply from his role as a philosopher who seeks, from the sources of reason, to establish the principles and criteria of what in the tradition was usually called natural religion or natural theology. Considering this, one could assume, for example, that there are in Kant's analysis firm grounds for setting aside the fundamental dogmatic content of religions, including those of Christianity.

Although motivated by different agendas, this stance has been reflected in important voices in the academic discussion but with greater radicality. Leaning on this side of Kant, it has become possible to say that the statuary religions will eventually disappear, and that their dogmatic core in the long run will be completely indifferent if the pure religion of reason makes its way into the world.[4] Not surprisingly, the secular radical readings of Kant have become

3 See *SF* in *GS*, vol. VII, p. 8.

4 See for instance the characterization that Allen Wood provides of this: "For Kant, there is only one religion—the religion of reason. But this religion manifests itself—and must manifest itself—only through many ecclesiastical faiths. What are called different 'religions,' and 'religious' struggles, 'religious' persecutions, and the insistence on 'religious' orthodoxy—all these concern only ecclesiastical faiths, not religion. It is the collective duty of humanity, part of their duty to found a true ethical community, to overcome all these differences, and the historical divergences, statutory observances and the superstitions, that lie at their foundation." See Allen Wood, "Ethical Community, Church and Scripture," in *Immanuel Kant. Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft,* ed. by Otfried Höffe, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2011, p. 127. Although Wood is right to point out that for Kant, strictly speaking, religion is only one and that efforts should be made to transcend the various idiosyncratic barriers that arbitrarily separate one ecclesial community from another, it seems to me that he seriously

more and more popular. In what follows, I would like to review some of them in order to present later, in the other sections, some arguments that allow us to look at the issue from a very different standpoint—a standpoint which I find more accurate and coherent with the complexity of Kant's own proposal. But let us first take a look at the views of those who might be called "secular Kantians."

1 Forms of Secularism in the Scholarly Debate about Religion in Kant

Possibly, as a mixture of the reasons mentioned above, there has surged a certain Kantian literature that seeks to place religion in a most peculiar place within Kant's thought. As a matter of fact, these efforts go back to biographical reports and testimonies about the philosopher. Let us mention them briefly before delving into the more recent scholarship. Thus, for example, just to bring up a famous historical case, the anecdote is well known, according to which Kant is thought to have reintroduced God into his system only because of the emotional impact that the first *Critique* was said to have had on his butler Lampe. In the story that the poet Heinrich Heine provides of this, we see a Kant who thinks that Lampe, like any ordinary person, "must have a God."[5] It is due to his compassion that he is thought to have reinterpreted and relocated God as the essential ground of the universal order in the second *Critique*, but only from the moral standpoint, within the postulates of pure practical reason. Another "biographical" reading that has been launched in order to defend the alleged marginal religion in his thought is that according to which Kant, in his personal life, was not religious at all and could even be considered for practical purposes an atheist. It would only be in virtue of his social position and environment that he was willing to make some kind of concessions to religious

neglects all the other elements of *Religion* which imply factually a strong Christian dogmatic background and speak against an absolute secularization of the religious phenomenon—elements which we will analyze in due course in the present study. Moreover, it also seems to me that he does not realize that the tendency to overcome the separation of the various religious congregations is at best nothing more than an asymptotic ideal. At the end of the day, Kant clearly recognizes that "[Nature] avails herself of two means of keeping peoples from intermixing and of separating them: differences in *languages* and *religions*," thereby impeding the absolute cultural, political, idiosyncratic, and religious homogenization of humanity (*TPP* in *GS*, vol. VIII, p. 367).

5 See Heinrich Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany and Other Writings*, ed. by Terry Pinkard and trans. by Howard Pollack-Milgate, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, p. 129.

discourse in order not to be subsequently harassed or intimidated by public authorities.[6]

But the tendency to interpret Kant in this way is not limited to those who appeal or have appealed to historical or biographical factors. Even reputed contemporary Kantian scholars have analyzed and discussed Kant's own texts with a similar agenda of "secularizing" the philosopher. The theses they endorse are more or less linked. On the one hand, there are some who suggest that Kantian religious philosophy is, in itself, no more than an appendix to his ethics. On the other hand, there are authors who, while recognizing that there are elements in Kant that indeed point to a more conventional and transcendent conception of religiosity, nevertheless, it is much more coherent and, above all, much more in keeping with the ethical sensibility of our times, to make the attempt to strongly secularize all the religious Kantian discourse—for rather systematic purposes—and bring it to the realm of universal validation of pure practical reason. Let us review some of the main positions on the subject in order to better understand their nature.

In my opinion the first prominent scholar who, in recent times, endorsed a position that goes along these lines was Andrews Reath. Himself a pupil of Rawls, Reath is very much inclined towards a reading that would minimize or even eliminate, in relation to Kant's theory of the *summum bonum*, all theological remnants. In his view, Kant's texts have some sort of double dimension: a theological and a secular-political one. In regard to these perspectives and while describing how he will address Kant's doctrine of the Highest Good, he stresses the following: "I will do so by showing that there are different conceptions of the Highest Good in the texts, both a 'theological' conception and a 'secular' (or political) conception, and will suggest a rationale for taking the latter as the best expression of Kant's view."[7]

Ever since then, there has been a proliferation of this kind of interpretation. Thus, we find also in Sharon Anderson-Gold the surprising claim that the role of God, in late writings such as the *Religionsschrift*, has been downplayed, and everything we could consider as a task of God as the allocator of virtue in proportion to happiness can now be deemed as a rather social enterprise.[8] In the

6 See George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind 1774–1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, pp. 203ff.; and Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002, pp. 318ff.

7 See Andrews Reath, "Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1988, p. 594.

8 See Sharon Anderson-Gold, "God and Community: An Enquiry into the Religious Implications of the Highest Good," in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, ed. by Philip J. Rossi and Michael Wreen, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1991, pp. 126–127.

opinion of this commentator, the role of God in this late phase of Kant changes radically:

> This conception of God is not derived from the function of a World Designer, not even from the function of a Judge. Rather it is closer to the function attributed in Christian theology to the sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit, incarnate in the living social organization of the Church. It is an activity which cannot be thought of in terms used to describe an external substance.[9]

Thus, the ethical community [*ethisches Gemeinwesen*] that, according to the third book of *Religion,* human beings ought to conform to in order to resist radical evil is now a sufficient supplement and replacement of the previous theory of the Highest Good and its metaphysical requirements. In a very similar vein, Thomas Nenon claims this:

> Another way of interpreting the doctrine of the highest good…is a demand not to wait until the next life and leave it up to an omnipotent God to distribute the goods required for happiness in accord with virtue, but rather as expressing a moral duty for human beings in this life to promote a distribution of material goods and other rewards in the world according to the moral deservedness of the recipients.[10]

Two other similar testimonies are the following ones. On the one hand, we find, in a rather exegetical text, a contribution by Jürgen Habermas in which he aims to clarify the entire nature of Kant's philosophy of religion. In Habermas' view, it is clear that Kant realized in his late stage that a completely rational and a priori ethics would hardly connect with the common ethical mentality of people, which was highly influenced by traditional religiosity. For this reason, what Kant did was a kind of translation of those doctrinal contents—which had a capacity to really move individuals to action—into the language of his critical philosophy. In that essay, Habermas claims that

> Kant wants to preserve a moment of promise, but stripped of its sacred character. In order to insulate the moral disposition from discouraging appearances, it must be supplemented by the dimension of confidence

9 Sharon Anderson-Gold, "God and Community," p. 129.

10 Thomas Nenon, "The Highest Good and the Happiness of Others," *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik*, vol. 5, 1997, p. 426.

> in a finite success as the possible summation of all moral actions in the world. Kant's primary concern here is not to subsume all religious contents under concepts but to integrate the pragmatic meaning of the religious *mode* of faith as such into reason.[11]

Finally, in a monograph that aims to explore the notion of community in Kant's thought, Kate A. Moran claims the following, which seems to be a sort of consummation of many of the previous exegetical efforts mentioned above:

> Kant's description of the ethical community in the *Religion* is thus a description of a secular and shared goal. So, while it may be the case that an individual might not experience the most happiness consistent with her own virtue, perhaps because of bad luck, it will nevertheless remain the case that, when it comes to the community of agents, the highest degree of happiness is consistent with the highest degree of virtue will obtain.…[I]t is precisely because individuals are virtuous—that they respect others' ends so far as this is consistent with the moral law—that people are, on the whole, happy. Thus, we see in the *Religion* the culmination of Kant's changing thought on the highest good.[12]

As can be observed from the passages of the authors cited above, it is clear that the Kantian literature on the philosophy of religion has a strong secularist current that seeks to dilute or downplay aspects that, in very broad terms, belong to the vision of a traditional religiosity, especially in the Christian context. Although this is not always the case, it is more or less clear, in my view, that many of these positions stem, as it were, from an attempt to reinterpret the *summum bonum* theory in another manner that becomes less dependent on or totally independent from God. From that specific point of view, these positions could be strongly criticized on firm textual grounds. However, although I do intend to say something about Kant's doctrine of the Highest Good in the present study, my way of distancing myself from these readings will not follow straightforwardly that argumentative strategy. Rather, what I aim to do here is first to give certain general coordinates of Kant's philosophy of religion that

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11 Jürgen Habermas, "The Boundary between Faith and Knowledge: On the Reception and Contemporary Importance of Kant's Philosophy of Religion," in his *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, trans. by Ciaran Cronin, Cambridge and Malden: Polity 2008, p. 222.

12 Kate Moran, *Community and Progress in Kant's Moral Philosophy*, Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 2012, p. 71.

undoubtedly refer it back to its Christian origins—origins from which, in my opinion, Kant never quite manages to detach himself. In other words, the thesis that I will defend could be formulated in this way: although Kant defends the position—as we have seen in *The Conflict of the Faculties*—according to which he would only be constructing and developing a rational religion, what I will say is that this rational religion is strongly linked to fundamental Christian premises. This explains why it is difficult both to accept a Kantian philosophy of religion on an exclusively ethical-political basis and to suppose that rational religion *entirely* replaces or annuls the background or contents of statutory religions, at least when one is dealing with Christianity in Kant. Another important thesis that I want to defend is that, although the Kantian philosophy of religion poses itself as a branch of the transcendental critical project, it is impossible for this discipline to separate itself completely from historical facticity, and, in particular, from the repercussion and historical impact that certain theses of Christian dogmatics have had in the course of human affairs.

I will now deal one by one with some of the fundamental theses that, in my understanding, shape Kant's philosophy of religion and which support the position according to which Kant's stance is deeply infused with some theses of Christian dogmatics that cannot be simply rejected or put aside entirely from his whole enterprise.

2 Kant's Theory of Radical Evil and Grace

In the *Religion*, Kant explains that there are two ways of approaching religious questions. On the one hand, he first describes his common procedure in earlier works in dealing with these subjects. In his view, what the philosopher can do is to address in a rather theoretical way, on the basis of the pure demands of morality, issues that are connected with a transcendent dimension of human existence. By doing that, he can construct a "pure *rational system* of religion" [*reinen* Vernunftsystem *der Religion*].[13] On the other hand, he outlines a different approach that seeks to take into account the development of concrete religions, and, is based on what would be, for example, their sacred books. In this case, the philosopher aims to determine by means of scriptural exegesis or hermeneutics what would be compatible with the moral demands of practical reason.[14] Precisely by means of practical reason, the philosopher would have in this second approach a safe and reliable criterion to discern aspects of

13 See *Rel.* in GS, vol. VI, pp. 12–13.

14 See ibid., pp. 12–13.

the sacred texts of enormous moral value from those aspects that, in a certain sense, are only contingent or accidental.

For example, miraculous, historical, fantastic, poetic or mythological aspects of these sacred texts are not relevant for the practical philosopher who studies them.[15] In other words, we could say that these kinds of contents have no binding force whatsoever. Moreover, the predominance of practical reason is shown in the fact that it can exhibit distrust or even harshly criticize certain kinds of contents of this type in the sacred texts. In this sense, Kant thinks that the doctrine of the resurrection in Christian eschatology can become problematic since it seems to put our spiritual-intelligible dimension on a same level with our bodily one.[16] Moreover, as is well known, Kant strongly criticizes the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac since that story openly points out that God can command us to commit immoral acts.[17] Since this story stands in direct opposition to the dictates of practical reason and goes against everything we can rationally conceive about God, the coherent thing to do here is to take such a story as a mythical content that has no specific weight whatsoever in the way we understand rational religion.

Another interesting aspect of this Kantian revisionist methodology on religious content consists, in my opinion, in the fact that various biblical narratives can exhibit their profound meaning precisely through the exegesis and scrutiny of practical reason.[18] This is what happens, in my view, with the critical examination of the Fall in the book of Genesis. In the case of his analysis of the Fall, what Kant provides in his role as a teacher of reason [*Vernunftlehrer*] is not a historical account but rather the deep elucidation of the drama of human freedom embodied in our propensity to evil. By giving man freedom, God did not give him the "capacity" [*Unvermögen*]—if it can be called that[19]—to commit evil for evil's sake. Seeking evil for evil's sake is a conduct that cannot be attributed to human beings, who always act under a certain representation of the good.[20] In the case of the human being, the way in which evil makes its appearance is when one places self-love above the moral law.

In the Kantian account, humanity sealed its entire destiny after having committed at some point in history some kind of moral transgression. For although Kant emphasizes that it is each individual who, freely, incurs evil—for

15 See ibid., p. 84.
16 See ibid., p. 129.
17 See ibid., p. 187; *SF* in *GS*, vol. VII, pp. 62–63.
18 See *Rel.* in *GS*, vol. VI, p. 44.
19 See ibid., p. 29.
20 See ibid., p. 30; *KpV* in *GS*, vol. V, p. 59.

otherwise evil would not be imputable to us[21]—that first incursion into evil makes it impossible to consider the entire human race in the same way from that moment onwards. There is, so to speak, no further room for innocence: no one can any longer consider herself invulnerable to the temptation of putting self-love above moral demands. Hence, it must be assumed that the universality of this evil affects our species as a whole. Moreover, since committing this transgression implies changing their fundamental moral conviction [*Gesinnung*] for a negative one, it is not to be expected that human beings can reverse their condition except through divine intercession. Thus, in line with traditional Christian thought, Kant opens up space within his philosophy of religion for the notion of divine cooperation [*Mitwirkung*], or, in more familiar religious terms, grace [*Gnade*]. For it is only God who, in the last analysis, can bring the human being back on track towards the fundamental moral conviction that she lost through her actions.[22]

To be sure, I have not intended to make an exhaustive reconstruction of all the aforementioned topics. That would go far beyond the scope of my study. Rather, my intention was to bring these the elements to the forefront in order to defend, on an adequate basis, the following thesis: although Kant does not

21 See *Rel.* in *GS*, vol. VI, p. 25.

22 Character, for Kant, can be understood as a hierarchically structured set of maxims, of which there is a superior maxim above the rest called *Gesinnung*. Since this maxim presupposes the radical orientation of the human being towards good or evil, and since the human being freely chooses—in an act for which we do not properly have any rational explanation—to change the good *Gesinnung* for a bad one, it is impossible for the human being to bring forth the necessary restitution: if the fundamental maxim of conduct is bad, then all other maxims will also be bad, or at least they will be significantly affected and compromised. And there is no reason to believe that an individual will have the entire motivational force to change this state of affairs since the dominant principle of his character has been harmed and corrupted. Therefore, we must think that this change can only be produced by divine intercession, which in the Christian dogmatics has been usually called grace. For a useful discussion of grace in Kant's philosophy of religion see Jacqueline Mariña, "Kant on Grace: A Reply to his Critics," *Religious Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1997, pp. 379–400. This clearly contrasts with Wood's secular reading of radical evil, for he fully equates this notion with that of unsociable sociability. See Allen Wood, "Kant's Fourth Proposition: The Unsociable Sociability of Human Nature," in *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Amélie Oksenberg and James Schmidt, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, p. 112–128. In Wood's view, the establishment of an ethical community would enable individuals to cope sufficiently with evil. But this proposal neglects the strictly personal dimension of the constitution of character and of *Gesinnung* as the fundamental maxim of moral conduct which, as has been emphasized, can only be repaired by God. In sum, this secular reading of radical evil as a mere social phenomenon does not do justice to the complexity and transcendent dimension of Kant's thought.

claim, for example, that his theory of radical evil can be equated without further ado with the theory of the Fall in Genesis—since the theory of radical evil must stand on its own grounds: it is an a priori transcendental account that does not describe a historical fact but rather an atemporal deviation, in a noumenal realm, of the *Gesinnung* of an individual—the fact is that, despite the speculative character of Kant's doctrine, this transgression did materialize in history with the first actual moral wrong that defied the order of things that God disposed with regard to us,[23] and all of mankind was definitely marked afterwards because of this event.

In other words, from a Kantian standpoint, I believe that, in the end, it does not really matter if it was indeed Adam and Eve—as concrete historical figures, with those very names and other very particular characteristics described in the Genesis—who with their sins defined the path of mankind, or if things were somehow different with our first ancestors who, with knowledge of the moral law and its demands, decided to subvert it and place self-love above it, thereby deviating from God—provided, of course, that our first ancestors had some direct or indirect notice of God.[24] In the end, the case is that, either we learn it from the biblical story or from the sources of philosophy or religion, we must conclude that, historically speaking, mankind deviated indeed from the path it ought to follow, and that is why history, from that point onwards, became a *Heilsgeschichte*: a history of salvation in which God must necessarily

23 See *Rel.* in GS, vol. VI, pp. 32ff.

24 It is true that Kant uses the expression "we have all sinned in Adam," but the biblical passage in Rom. 5:12, which is the one Kant is alluding to, does not mention Adam explicitly as one can observe in the Greek original, in Luther's translation, and in the King James Bible, which I will quote now: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." In his analysis, which follows the principles already stipulated, Kant is not forced to accept the historical existence of Adam. He has only to assume that an early ancestor committed the first moral transgression. His reference to Adam here, therefore, seems to have to do with what Pluhar points out in his commentary notes to his Kant's translation: "The reading, 'in Adam we all sinned,' is the Augustinian interpretation (intended to support the doctrine of original sin) of this verse, based on the Vulgate translation (Latin translation authorized and used by the Roman Catholic Church) of the original Greek. This interpretation also remained dominant in early Protestant exegesis and still has many defenders today." See Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett 2009, p. 48, note 223. In addition, let us not forget the eloquent title of the opuscule in which Kant deals in detail with the story of the Genesis: "Conjectural Beginning of Human History." "Conjectural" [*Mutmaßlicher*] alludes clearly to the fact that Kant takes as a hypothetical thread the biblical account to explain the development and progress of humanity in its first steps, but without committing himself to any historical concrete belief.

intervene, for mankind is no longer in a state in which it can transcend evil by its own means. In either account, however, there is the commitment to the belief in a first historical transgression against God. In a way, thus, although the starting points of the biblical narrative and of the Kantian account are constructed differently, they end up having the same effects concerning the supernatural vocation of human beings that can only be fully satisfied with God's aid.[25]

I am certainly not defending here the thesis, according to which the Bible is only an allegorical account, and the Kantian philosophy of religion is the true explanation of the root of evil. Nor do I intend to defend the opposite thesis, according to which Kant conveniently designed his philosophy of religion—on a supposedly transcendental basis—on topics of which he could only have learned from his confrontation with the sacred texts. In general terms, I think that, although there may be for theoretical purposes a great complementarity between one source and the other, for practical purposes what is really relevant is that the one and the other coincide in many of their historical effects and in the tasks that, from the point of view of a moral theodicy, humanity, as such, has to posit for itself at all costs. In addition, in its discussion and explanation of these topics with regard to the subsequent historical development of mankind, I believe that the Kantian philosophy of religion finds, if not its must full-fledged justification, at least an important confirmation of its adequacy. Therefore, the fact that human beings have infringed and continue to infringe on the moral law—something about which we can have certainty in experience[26]—cannot be indifferent either to Kant's moral and religious enterprise, even when the explanatory resources of the latter are those of his critical transcendental project in dialogue with the Bible.

3 Christ and Kant's Archetype of the Perfect Moral Man

A similar theoretical development of ideas can be found in Kant's account of the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. The way in which Kant comes to consider Jesus of Nazareth's figure is undoubtedly peculiar. To be sure, his access is not based, for example, on following the promise, within the biblical narrative, that God would have made for the people of Israel of a Messiah. Nor does it focus, retrospectively, on allegorical readings that see his prefiguration and advent in Old Testament passages. In keeping with his moral reading of Scripture, Kant

25 See *Rel.* in *GS*, vol. VI, pp. 45–53.
26 See ibid., p. 63; p. 70.

posits, first, the need for a moral archetype [*Urbild*] that is pleasant to God.[27] In accordance with the principle of *ultra posse nemo obligatur*, Kant assumes that it must be possible for humanity to transcend the radical evil that afflicts it. If there were no means of fulfilling this obligation, a way out of this state could be neither demandable nor expected. That is why, as I have just stressed, Kant points to the existence of a form of humanity pleasant to God, which finds its first seat in an archetypal paradigm in the manner of an a priori idea of self-legislating reason,[28] or, as he also puts it, the "archetype of the moral conviction in its complete pureness" [*Urbild der sittlichen Gesinnung in ihrer ganzen Lauterkeit*].[29]

Therefore, it could be said that, in Kant's opinion, humanity already had such a paradigm before the factual arrival of Jesus of Nazareth to the world. Paradoxically speaking, we could say that a form of Christianity already existed without Jesus. But the factual arrival of this individual in the world changes the whole state of affairs, for humanity—that is to say, the individuals who in the first place, witnessed his presence, and, subsequently, those who learned from him through the Gospels—has had from that point onwards a firm and robust criterion for identifying the correspondence of this historical individual with the archetypal paradigm of practical reason. As Kant calls him, he becomes then the "personified idea of the good principle" [[*p*]*ersonificierte Idee des guten Prinzips*].[30]

Now, here again we find important differences between traditional Christian faith and Kantian critical hermeneutics, for the latter, drawing from the sources of mere reason, as the title of the book reads, has no elements whatsoever to suppose that Jesus of Nazareth is God himself: he is to be conceived rather as a "naturally engendered human being" [*natürlich gezeugten Menschen*].[31] Here we find, so to speak, a lowering of his figure, for it is impossible to imagine or rationally justify a figure of a triune God, a mystery that transcends all reason or all possible explanations. Nor do we have the elements to assume dogmatic theses—of the type that were the object of continuous discussion and revision in the first councils of Christianity—that maintain, for example, that we are dealing with a single person who has two distinct natures. In any case, it is convenient to say that Kant at no time denies that the aforementioned theses may be true, but he recognizes the radical impossibility of giving a demonstration

27 See ibid., p. 61; p. 119.
28 See ibid., pp. 61–63.
29 See ibid., p. 61.
30 Ibid., p. 60.
31 See ibid., p. 63; p. 80.

of them. Therefore, the only thing he can maintain consistently is that we are dealing with an exceptional moral teacher. In this context, it must be said that the philosopher is very cautious and respectful in referring to his figure throughout the text. At no time does Kant call him Jesus or Christ; rather, in consonance with the scope of his enquiry, he employs epithets such as the "wise teacher" [*weiser Lehrer*] or the "teacher of the Gospel" [*Lehrer des Evangeliums*].[32]

Kant's account of Jesus does not end with his simple consideration as a moral teacher. Even if, since his presence in history, human beings have found a path to moral perfection, this does not mean that they have already been able to make amends for all their moral faults. In other words, moral transgressions prior to a revolution of the heart, as Kant calls it, are not simply compensated with subsequent good moral acts of conduct, but objectively speaking, they would still be subject to a penalty or a punishment. And there is nothing with which human beings can, in this case, compensate God for the fact that they have dismissed the moral law and have put their self-love and selfishness first, so that, as terrible and harsh as this sounds, the only penalty that would be appropriate in this context would be to be permanently excluded in the afterlife from God's kingdom.[33]

Faced with this terrible scenario, however, Kant does find here a dogmatic content that is justifiable based on the sources of moral reason. The fact that the human race has been able to produce at least *one* individual who entirely pleases God opens up a very important margin for hope. In other words, if there is an individual like the teacher of the Gospel who can bear the sins of humanity, and who can make a vicarious sacrifice for the rest of mankind—even, says Kant, by suffering the most ignominious and dishonorable of deaths[34]—then it is reasonable to expect piety and mercy on the part of the Creator.[35] In other words, we human beings can aspire to be children of God to the extent that we have moral faith in this sacrifice, and more importantly, to the extent that we are willing to radically follow his example concerning a perfect moral life.

As can be seen, after all on this account we find ourselves, as far as the structure of the problem is concerned, in a scenario quite similar to the one we faced when dealing with the problem of radical evil and grace. While, from the perspective of traditional Christianity and its dogmatics, in Jesus we find the second figure of the Trinity (begotten, not created), who exists together with the Father from all times and who fulfills the promise of a Messiah, from

32 Ibid., p. 84; p. 128.
33 See ibid., p. 60; p. 69; p. 135.
34 See ibid., pp. 65–66.
35 See ibid., pp. 131–135.

the Kantian perspective, in turn, we find, first, a paradigm established in our moral conscience that later, historically, finds in incarnate form a manifestation, which shows us the path of redemption. But we also find that these narratives—one theological and the other philosophical—which start from very different premises, intertwine in history with the factual presence of this individual who from both perspectives guarantees salvation to the human race to the extent that the latter is willing to follow his teachings.

Because of this reason, I would venture to say that the historical presence of Jesus of Nazareth acquires a much greater relevance than Kant, at least theoretically, seems explicitly willing to grant it when he outlines the general and critical lines of his philosophy of religion. For let us remember that, on the premises of that program, acceptance of or faith in certain historical events was not as such something demanded. Rather, the method seems merely to limit itself to finding moral value in the sacred texts and to incorporating it into our general moral outlook. But that does not hold as simply as that in this case. On the one hand, the mere presence of the archetype of a perfect moral human being could potentially be disorienting for the moral agent without the concrete exemplarity of an individual who had incarnated it. On the other hand, and more importantly, since the moral faults we have committed against God cannot be washed away by our own merits, and there is the objective need of a vicarious sacrifice in order to redeem us, the belief in the actual and historical figure of a Savior must be adopted. Thus, we find here a particular instance that, in a way, transcends the limits of the biblical hermeneutics that Kant laid down and approaches, willingly or not, the more traditional conception of Jesus of Nazareth as Christ.

4 Some Reflections on the Summum Bonum in the Religion

In this section, I would like to address, albeit from a general perspective, the question of the *summum bonum* or Highest Good in the *Religion*, because, as we have seen, this particular issue has been the one that has motivated many interpreters to claim that in the Kantian philosophy of religion in general we find an underlying secular view. It will be impossible for the scope of my research to go into all the particular theses of the readings already referred to in the first section of this study, but I hope, nevertheless, that the coordinates that I am about to offer will constitute a sufficient basis for questioning the pertinence of those interpretations.

First of all, I would like to point out that the theory of the *summum bonum* has indeed received different treatments in Kant's various works. Undoubtedly,

the philosopher has made changes of emphasis and even important modifications of his theory from one work to another.[36] But, broadly speaking, it seems clear to me that his theory of the Highest Good is unitary.[37] The aspects of the theory of the Highest Good that hold throughout his thought ever since the formulation in the *Critique of Pure Reason* are in my opinion the following ones: 1) the Highest Good is, in every presentation, the answer to the question "what may I hope for?";[38] 2) it establishes a proportionality between morality and happiness, the former being a condition for the latter;[39] 3) the link it demands between morality and happiness can only be achieved "if a *supreme reason* that commands according to moral laws is also laid at the basis of nature, as nature's cause";[40] and 4) it goes hand in hand with the practical belief in one's own freedom and immortality.[41]

Although the only incentive for moral action must be the realization of duty, it is nonetheless true that, for Kant, the human being cannot be indifferent to the final outcome of her moral strivings.[42] And since the actual convergence between morality and happiness must be believed or at least conceived as possible—for otherwise there could be the risk of considering the whole morality as a vain illusion[43]—it becomes then necessary to assume practical faith in a being like God so that he guarantees this fulfillment.

To my understanding, there are no reasons at all to claim that this belief has been given up in the *Religion*. Quite the contrary, there we can explicitly read, for instance, that we must assume "the idea of a Highest Good in the world, for the possibility of which we must assume a higher, moral, holiest, and all-powerful being that alone can unite the two elements of this good."[44] As if this statement were not enough, we find in *Religion* all the preceding discussions which, while pretending to remain within the limits of rational religion, undoubtedly point towards divine transcendence: 1) the discussion of grace as divine cooperation that allows human beings to change their *Gesinnung* and

36 For an analysis of the development of the Highest Good theory throughout Kant's various works see Daniel Keller, *Der Begriff des höchsten Guts bei Immanuel Kant: Theologische Deutungen*, Munster: Mentis 2008.

37 A paper in which I have defended and explored this thesis in more depth is Eduardo Charpenel, "El summum bonum en el Religionsschrift de Kant," *Signos filosóficos*, vol. 22, no. 43, 2020, pp. 58–87.

38 KrV A805/B833.

39 See KrV A808/B836.

40 KrV A810/B838.

41 See KrV A814/B842ff.

42 See *Rel.* in *GS*, vol. VI, p. 5.

43 See KrV A811/B839; see also KpV in *GS*, vol. V, p. 114.

44 *Rel.* in *GS*, vol. VI, p. 5; cf. ibid., p. 6.

to have a meritorious moral conduct; 2) the necessity of a divine archetype that incarnates and shows us in an exemplary way the possibility of leading a morally perfect life; and 3) the necessity of the vicarious sacrifice of this perfect individual that allows him to bear the sins of humanity and to redeem it.

To these topics we can add at least two others that are no less important and that are also consistent with the different presentations that have been made of the Highest Good in other Kantian writings: 4) The idea that we human beings are to be judged in another life by our actions, something for which, evidently, we need to presuppose our immortality, as this is reiterated in the *Religion*;[45] and that the sentence of that judgment will rest exclusively on the merit of our moral conduct. And now, even more importantly, we must add the central and explicit premise (5) about the *true* authorship of the ethical community that we ought to conform to resist evil: "Founding a moral people of God is, therefore, a work whose execution can be expected not from human beings but only from God himself."[46]

In light of these considerations, it is indeed quite difficult to understand how it is that there have been commentators who have sustained the radical secular readings we have portrayed. In my opinion, it is simply impossible to ignore the fact that at least certain key elements of the *summum bonum* theory remain intact, and that there are in the *Religion* a vast set of theses, premises and ideas that point to things of a clearly transcendent nature.

However, in seeking to make a charitable interpretation of why these secular readings have been offered, the only thing that seems to point in such a direction is the following: it is clear that in the text of the *Religion* we find the most abundant account of what it would entail for human beings to seek or try to consolidate the *summum bonum* on this earth.[47] But even if this is the most

45 See ibid., p. 157.

46 Ibid., p. 100.

47 Perhaps one of the inevitable ambiguities of the Kantian theory is *where* precisely this Highest Good will be consummated or attained. For while it seems that the postulates of immortality and God force us to think that this end cannot be achieved on earth, the theory demands in its various formulations that we should in fact strive for it and act as if it could be achieved through our efforts. But far from thinking that this ambiguity rests on a faulty reasoning, I believe that his indeterminacy alludes to the finitude of our knowledge since Kant himself points out that the representations of a future life for human beings must be confused with respect to its concrete details. See *Rel.* in *GS*, vol. VI, p. 128. Thus, as Pasternack points out, it could be that the consummation of the Highest Good takes place either in heaven, or in the Creation restored after the second coming of Christ, or in a New Jerusalem. See Lawrence R. Pasternack, *Kant on* Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: *An Interpretation and Defense*, New York: Routledge 2014, p. 211. For me, however, this indeterminacy of the theory can paradoxically be seen as one of its advantages, for it

detailed explanation in this respect, this does not mean, once again, that the Kantian position has undergone a substantive modification since the theory of the Highest Good has always pointed to the fact that human beings have to act *as if* it were through their actions that the *summum bonum* would indeed be achieved,[48] when in fact God is the ultimate cause of it. Hence, in my opinion, the most plausible thing to think is that here we find a complementary development of ideas that is in no sense of lesser value.[49] On the contrary, the discussion about the ethical community opens an important path of reflection to think by what means human beings can resist the radical evil that permanently threatens them.

Now, what remains to be asked is why this discussion of the ethical community in relation to the *summum bonum* takes place precisely within this framework. I believe that this is not a minor issue. I think that it is precisely the theoretical interaction between the rational religion proposed by Kant and the statutory religions that makes possible the appropriate context for this kind of inquiry. In the face of the typically modern phenomenon in which philosophical reason is empowered and believes itself capable not only of providing assistance to religion, but also of revising it and even criticizing and amending it, a suitable terrain is established for thinking over and over again about what the function of religious institutions is and what place should they have in the life of the society. But we see that, in saying this, we are inevitably bringing up once again an eminently historical dimension of religiosity. Only certain historical

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opens the door both to strive here and now toward the ideal of the Highest Good and to still have hope for a future life.

48 See *KpV* in GS, vol. v, p. 125.

49 I think that an important distinction that can be brought up to explain Kant's different ways of dealing with the subject is found in the second *Critique*: "The concept of the *highest* already contains an ambiguity that, if one pays no attention to it, can occasion needless controversies. The highest can mean either the supreme (*supremum*) or the complete (*consummatum*). The first is that condition which is itself unconditioned, i.e., not subordinate to any other condition (*originarium*); the second is that whole which is not a part of a still greater whole of the same kind (*perfectissimum*)." (Ibid., 110). While the *original* Highest Good has to do with the fulfillment of what is required by morality, the *completed* Highest Good relates to the supernatural reward or punishment human beings receive according to their moral worth. Now, I think that, as far as the Highest Good is concerned, what we find in the third book of the *Religion* are more detailed specifications—in view of the history of human affairs and of the influence of particular religious communities—of what the *original* Highest Good would imply. But this does not mean at all, in my opinion, that Kant abandoned the dimension of the *completed* Highest Good. Possibly, the philosopher thinks that the latter dimension has been sufficiently clarified in previous works. In addition, we have seen that the elements that would make a *completed* Highest Good possible in an afterlife continue to be presupposed throughout *Religion*.

conditions have allowed statutory religions to develop and flourish. Likewise, only certain historical conditions have made it possible for individuals to take a certain distance in order to be able to articulate a critical philosophy of religion that, at least with regard to the Kantian case, does not understand itself as a Jacobin project. The Kantian project of a critical philosophy of religion, as can be seen in the various topics we have explored, does not abandon the fruitful exchange that can occur between self-legislative moral reason and the historical experience itself of the development of religious traditions. And this seems to me to be a valuable legacy that we, as late children of the Enlightenment, should not be willing to give up.

5 Final Remarks

Rather than presenting conclusions in the strict sense, what I would like to develop are certain reflections considering the discussion we have presented throughout this study. As can be seen, Kant performs a highly original analysis of the biblical text by means of the orientation of the norms and criteria that autonomous morality can offer him. At first glance, if we strictly follow the description that Kant himself gives of his procedure, it seems in principle that it is practical reason that, in every single question and problem, has the last word. However, in reality we see that the relationship is not so simple. Kant, on multiple occasions, is forced, on the one hand, to accept or at least concede the possible transcendent character of certain dogmatic premises, and, on the other hand, to recognize the experience itself of the possible impact of such premises on the development and historical course of human affairs.

Thus, one can appreciate that, despite some of the philosopher's methodological assertions, the relationship we find between autonomous morality and the concrete historical developments of religious congregations or statutory churches does not turn out to be one of simple subordination in all cases. Rather, it seems that it is possible, even if the philosopher does not explicitly state it, to find in his writings a model, in which the critical philosophy of religion maintains itself in permanent exchange and discussion with concrete religious manifestations, either to correct the development of the latter or to allow itself to be questioned by their otherness and singularity. A dynamic process of this nature appears to be much more promising both theoretically and practically than those of a secular nature that we have discussed.

An additional observation may be noted. Precisely secular Kantians deplore the fact that the course of human history has not followed what, in their view, was Kant's ultimate ambition, namely, that all statutory religions should

disappear and give way to the religion of reason. Allen Wood, who admits that this has been the actual course of events, deplores this state of affairs and remarks the following:

> Clearly Kant's…hopes for religion have not been nearly so successful—indeed, it can be argued that the real world has gone in an opposite direction. Human culture has tended toward a profound split between religious culture and secular culture. Religious thought of all sorts tends to regard itself as a bastion of resistance against "the Enlightenment" while the rationalist values through which Kant hoped to reform religion are often defended by secularists only in an openly anti-religious form.…We may even, on reflection, conclude that the fact the philosopher's doctrines do not correspond to reality is more the fault of reality than it is of those doctrines.[50]

In my opinion, a completely different diagnosis can be drawn from the course of history. The fact that particular congregations of faith and churches have not disappeared should not be translated into pessimism of reason or a distrust of the critical philosophy of religion. Rather, this course of events should be seen as an area of opportunity so that the critical philosophy of religion does not itself become a form of dogmatism and remains always open to learn from the experience of plurality that particular manifestations of faith offer.

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50 See Allen Wood, "Ethical Community, Church and Scripture," pp. 149–150.

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CHAPTER 6

Eriugena's Angels: A Case Study on a Role of Imagination in Spirituality

Anton Vydra

Abstract

The question of whether our spirituality is based on our imaginative abilities, or whether it is our imagination that determines the direction of our spirituality, is a crucial issue of this text. The theme of angels as celestial beings, interpreters and messengers, helpers and "brothers of humans" serves as a background for this inquiry. Ancient, medieval, and renaissance thinkers dealt with them extensively. John Scottus Eriugena, a representative of Carolingian Neoplatonism, had a special place in this context. His extensive work *Periphyseon* is, among other things, a re-thinking and reflection on the images of angels of the time, taken mainly from the patristic tradition. Eriugena was undoubtedly a deeply spiritual and educated man, the translator of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and of other patristic texts. His understanding of angels shows how much spirituality is the daughter of his imagination, and how this imagination has influenced the spiritual life of his later readers. The result is that our spirituality could be understood as a sign of the level of the cultivation of our imagination.

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Is spirituality born of imagination, or is imagination the fruit of spirituality? It seems there is no spirituality without images, even if we take as an example an abstract mystical form of religious life using the *via negativa* in its explanations. After all, the negation of images is based on working with images. Even mystical darkness is only part of the metaphysics of light.

One of the best-known imaginative frames in Semitic and Christian religious culture was and still is that of angels. There was a time in history when angels were part of a rational worldview. Today, rational reasoning is reluctant to admit the existence of such beings, and certainly not in the way in which Hellenistic, Gnostic, Neoplatonic, or Scholastic authors have often described them. However, today's believers do not seem to want to give up faith in angels. Some continue to nurture the image of winged beings that protect their steps, others have transformed them more into immortal spiritual forces, but they

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still retain a certain number of personal characteristics (will, intellect, or cognition).

For example, the Catholic Church, in regard to belief in the angels, refers to the confirmation of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we could read that it is "a truth of faith,"[1] which follows biblical descriptions and the ancient teaching of the Church fathers and saints, especially St. Augustine: "the witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition."[2] And next: "As purely spiritual creatures angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendour of their glory bears witness."[3] Of course, the question remains to what extent the mentioned unanimity is clear, especially if we study the works of early Christian authors in more detail.

The contemporary thinking is often led by a positivistic way of understanding the world. For proponents of positivist rationalism, angels would be a topic of human superstition and self-deception. There is no scientific evidence of their existence or effects, and so the truths of faith are here confronted with scientific truth. But there are opponents, too. Werner Heisenberg would counter that he has a "feeling that rationalism is not enough"[4] and that positivism has always the only one simple solution:

> the world must be divided into that which we can say clearly and the rest, which we had a better pass over in silence. But can anyone conceive of a more pointless philosophy, seeing that what we can say clearly amounts to next to nothing? If we omitted all that is unclear, we would probably be left with completely uninteresting and trivial tautologies.[5]

1 This does not mean that angels are the core of Christian faith. French theologian and Dominican friar, Serge-Thomas Bonino, very convincingly claims: "I have no trouble admitting that the teaching about angels and demons is not the heart of the Christian faith. This is a side issue, a marginal teaching about a peripheral truth in the hierarchy of revealed truths." Serge-Thomas Bonino, OP, *Angels and Demons: A Catholic Introduction*, trans. by Michael J. Miller, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press 2016, p. 1.

2 *CCC* V, 328–330. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Washington: United States Catholic Conference 2000, pp. 85–86.)

3 Ibid.

4 Werner Heisenberg, "Science and Religion," in his *Physics and Beyond: Encounters and Conversations*, trans. by Arnold J. Pomerans, New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row 1971, p. 92.

5 Werner Heisenberg, "Positivism, Metaphysics and Religion," in *Physics and Beyond: Encounters and Conversations*, p. 213.

Which should we choose? And according to what criteria? The decision will probably depend on personal preferences and the definition of what we consider to be a rationalist attitude in these two positions (or others).

However, the goal of this paper is not to elaborate proofs for or against the existence of angels. Rather, we want to say the following: your faith shapes your spirituality as well as your imagination. And that is why there is a close connection between your spirituality and your imagination, because if angels belong to your spiritual world, they will inevitably have some form in your imagination as well. This does not rule out the fact that someone can believe in God but not in angels. Choosing faith or submitting to some confession means thus accepting within oneself certain imaginations that the believer must personally deal with. In other words, just as your spirituality is, so are your angels: as existing or non-existent, as personified or impersonal, as hierarchically organized or non-hierarchical, as fulfilling this or that role in the whole of what exists. And thus, the history of angels becomes a special history of various spiritual experiences.

1 How to Philosophize on Angels?

Let us begin in the ancient times. There were ages when angels were not just a theological theme or a theme of fine arts. They were a part of myth through the greatest of the ancient messengers—e.g., the god Hermes or, in the Roman world, Mercury. Angels were also a part of philosophical-cosmological views, especially in Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, and the Middle Ages: we meet them eminently in Philo of Alexandria, St. Augustine, Proclus, the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and then again with his Latin translator John Scottus Eriugena. Later, the belief in the existence of angels as cosmical intelligences will be revived by Arab philosophy, especially by Avicenna, and we will, of course, find them in Scholasticism as well.

Occasionally, they were also mentioned in the Renaissance (especially in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola) and modern texts (in Immanuel Kant, too), but at that time they were already in decline in philosophical and scientific discourse. The less they were a part of outer space, the more God moved away from man, since there were no more intermediaries between Him and humans. God became more and more deistic, angels became more and more just a metaphor and an artistic article, first a Renaissance beautician, then a baroque chubby boy, later they disappeared completely, and their return was more reverent or caricature.

Surprisingly, however, at a time when it is quite legitimate to ask whether we should deal with the subject of angels today, we will receive an answer from

a side we might not expect at all: from Michel Serres in his book *Angels*,[6] in which ancient, medieval, and Renaissance imaginations of angels relate to the fast mass media and information world of the twentieth century. Or we could start with the book of Tiziana Suarez-Nani, *Angels and Philosophy*, in which she deals with the meaning of the medieval imaginations of angels in relation to philosophy, especially with Thomas Aquinas and Dietrich of Freiburg. In addition, Suarez-Nani argues that without angels, we would not be able to understand medieval and later anthropology, and moreover, we would not understand how modern subjectivity and anthropology develop precisely in identifying a human being with an angelic being, the existence of which was already rejected or at least questioned.[7]

However, although Michel Serres and Tiziana Suarez-Nani have renewed philosophical thinking about angels, this does not mean that they have returned them their ontological justification. Serres understands the angel only as a metaphor for the transmission of information. Suarez-Nani interprets medieval Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism, in which angels played the role of intermediate beings who filled the heavenly space. Neither of them dares to attribute to them the reality that today's man should take for granted and valid. Thus, the angel is either a metaphor or a historical entity of past imaginations.

Faith in angels today remains exclusively the partial domain of certain religions (as we saw above in the case of Catholic Church), but not even there in the way they were believed in the Middle Ages. Today's believer knows how to still speak of his faith in the existence of guardian angels, and he can attribute reality to biblical descriptions of archangels or messengers of God, but few would be willing to accept the composition of heaven as described by the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, where the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones

6 Michel Serres, *Angels*: *A Modern Myth*, trans. by Francis Cowper, Paris and New York: Flammarion 1995.

7 Tiziana Suarez-Nani, *Les anges et la philosophie. Subjectivité et fonction cosmologique des substance séparées à la fin XIIIe siècle*, Paris: Vrin 2002, pp. 186–187. Let us note there are many other brilliant studies about angelic beings in medieval philosophy and theology. We could mention David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998; or works focused more on Scholasticism and later periods: Tobias Hoffmann (ed.), *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy*, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2012; Isabel Iribarren and Martin Lenz (eds.), *Angels in Medieval Philosophical Inquiry: Their Function and Significance*, Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate 2008. Great and deep insight into the Neoplatonic understanding of angelic and daemonic beings is provided by Luc Brisson, Seamus O'Neill and Andrei Timotin (eds.), *Neoplatonic Demons and Angels*, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2020.

were highest to God, lower were the Dominations, Virtues, and Powers, and the lowest was the space for the Principalities, Archangels and Angels.[8]

The character of an angel has changed in the spirituality of current man: the angel is not a cosmological being, but rather a mediator, a petitioner, a helper, or a guardian. Medieval man often perceived the angel as an exemplar or the ideal to which he should orient his own life in order to re-unite with God in eternity (in a manner similar to how a soul in Plato follows its own daemon). But what will be the fulfillment of the angelic exemplar that today's believers are to imagine? Which imagination will they be inclined to? To the early Christian Cherubim and Seraphim, who fly around the God-One? To the medieval movers of the celestial spheres? To figures of the biblical narrative endowed with bodies, hand, legs, faces, as we see them in medieval and Renaissance paintings, for example in Fra Angelico? Or will modern believers interpret them as pure spirits or invisible powers that cannot be seen (even if some still imaginatively apprehend them) but that are somehow mysteriously present and active in their world? And how would they describe the effects of their activity? How would they describe the essence of these beings? And even if they did not want to dispute with others inventing evidence in the manner of medieval proofs of God's existence, how would they want to communicate their faith in angels to others, to unbelievers?

The problem grows even greater when the angels of today's spiritualities are no longer the cosmological interconnections of the universe, without which it would be empty and would evoke that cosmic *horror vacui* in humans. The human being, guided solely by reason, has long since abandoned this faith. Strictly speaking, even in the Middle Ages, angels were not always perceived only as a part of celestial mechanics. In Eriugena, angels are as created as humans, even at the same time. They are just other beings, or, as Eriugena writes, they are the elder and immaterial brothers of men.[9] The struggle for salvation is the same for them as for the people: they must strive for it. Just as apostate angels fell away from the faith (in opposition to Proclean daemonology)[10] in a

8 *De coel. hier*. VI, 2, 200D–201A. (Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, "De coelesti hierarchia," in *Corpus Dionysiacum*, Band II, ed. by Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter, Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter 2021.) However, Paul Rorem rightly adds, "*The Celestial Hierarchy* is not simply about the angels, at least not at first," but primarily about God and revelation, and Eriugena understood this intention. Paul Rorem, *The Dionysian Mystical Theology*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press 2015, p. 42, p. 82.

9 *PP*, V, 1005A. (Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (*The Division of Nature*), trans. by I. P. Sheldon-Williams, revised by John J. O'Meara, Montreal and Washington: Bellarmin and Dumbarton Oaks 1987.)

10 In his *De malorum subsistentia* Proclus claims that angels cannot be evil, and even demons are not: "Thus, neither in these demons does reason seem to find evil; for each of

moment of their creation, so also it is with humans. The angels in Eriugena's imagination are companions of humans in their common return to God.

If today's angelic beings can somehow fascinate the human imagination (and often rather in unbelievers than believers), then they are—paradoxically—just fallen or apostate angels: we see them on various book covers, in works of art, in literature and poetry. The fallen or apostate angel: it is a figure that keeps coming back, and the authors who work with it identify the human being in his existential mood with the fallen angel, with his weakness, with his negative situation of life.

Poor people, desperate and lost, fragmentated to pieces, drowning in anxiety—all these are like fallen angels, *they are* these fallen angels, *they are* beings who have lost the bliss of paradise, the faith in the eternal paradise for which they were created. They identify selves with fallen angels because according to them the hell is nowhere else: it is here, as in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*:

FAU.: Where are you damn'd?
MEPH.: In hell.
FAU.: How comes it, then, that thou art out of hell?
MEPH.: Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.[11]

The fallen angels have taken on the form of innocent people, often children, in the literary imagination since the twentieth century,[12] for example, a black boy as the diabolical guardian angel in Nikos Kazantzakis' novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Their innocent gaze misleads, deceives, obscures their true nature. Other times, they are gallant, well-dressed men, or handsome, educated ladies. Gone are the characters of horned devils and disgusting demons. The fallen angels are humanized, completely material and embodied; they have fallen into the material world and merged with it. And yet they still significantly transcend it.

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them does what it does according to its own nature, always in the same manner. And that is not evil." *De mal. sub*. 17, 25 (Proclus, *On the Existence of Evils*, trans. by Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel, London et al.: Bloomsbury 2014.)

11 *Doctor Faustus*, III, 75–78. (Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, New York: Routledge 2005.)

12 However, the innocent appearance of the devil was not completely unknown even in the Middle Ages and even took such extreme forms that the devil was depicted as Christ himself. We could find that in one altar painting from 1483 depicting St. Martin talking to the Devil, where the Devil tries to convince the saint that who he sees is in fact Christ. Ivan Gerát, *Legendary Scenes: An Essay on Medieval Pictorial Hagiography*, trans. by Martin Styan, Bratislava: Veda 2013, pp. 224–225.

Contemporary man often does not believe in angels or demons, but the demonic still scares him, and he still fears possible contact with something demonic, whether it has a personified form or it is just some horrific presence of elusive evil. Deeply inscribed and difficult to remove, fear of such evil and faith in it became the negative axis of today's naive human's spirituality. Today's man maybe no longer believes in angels, but he is still afraid of the demonic: after all, what if it still exists and could make his life unhappy?

The fear of the action of something demonic on human life describes to a large extent something that has been transferred from the essentiality of the demonic or angelic being of the past: their effect on man. Although an essential role was not attributed to the angel in the past, it is true that the power to impact the lower beings within the hierarchical universe was genuine to them. Their basic life goal was the intellectual sight of God and of secondary beings, qua intermediaries between Him and humans, but there were also angels who sought to help people rise to the path of Neoplatonic return into divine Unity. Similarly, guardian angels were thought to be able to avert from people some evil that could have happened or to prevent people from committing evil themselves.

It is not the aim of a philosopher today to affirm or refute the existence of angels. It is the domain of some theological angelology (if exists) to deal with it, somehow to redefine this concept, to incorporate it into the spiritual experiences of today's man. But what can a philosopher do with this subject today? What attitude can he take today on a topic that does not seem philosophical? We have seen Michel Serres' or Taziana Suarez-Nani's efforts. Is this the only way? Through metaphors or through the history of philosophy and theology? Is this a topic for philosophy at all? As Georges Canguilhem once wrote: "Philosophy is a reflection for which all unknown material is good, and we would gladly say, for which all good material must be unknown."[13]

My intention is to explore the role of imagination in spiritual experiences and the relation between human images of the unknowable and their forms of spirituality. This could help us anthropologically to better understand human beings within the interpretation of their faith. I choose Eriugena's *Periphyseon* as a mirror of mainly Augustinian, Pseudo-Dionysian and Neoplatonic opinions about intelligible beings, that is, angels. In this work we can find several important leading clues to our theme, and we can see how imaginative forces are related to spiritual life. For the sake of completeness, let us add that Eriugena later wrote an important commentary on the Pseudo-Dionysius called

13 Georges Canguilhem, *On the Norm and The Pathological*, trans. by Carolyn R. Fawcett, New York: Zone Books 1991, p. 7.

Expositions on the Celestial Hierarchy, which also influenced the medieval understanding of aesthetics, including the aesthetics of depicting angels.

2 Thinking the Unthinkable

John Scottus Eriugena is a remarkable case of spiritual imagination. His *Periphyseon* (*De divinatione naturae*) is a Neoplatonic dialogical epic about the Nature.[14] Eriugena's form of writing follows Alcuin's dialogical method that was used in Charlemagne's Palatine School in the court of Aachen. The *Nutritor* (Teacher) and the *Alumnus* (Student) talk about a great story of creation and of a return of *all* into Unity with/in God.[15] The basic frame of the discourse is the Neoplatonic scheme of emanation, but in the Christian interpretation of St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Augustine, or Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Eriugena's Christian faith, including angelic intelligible celestial powers, is *nihil novum sub sole*. Eriugena is not interested in the question of their real existence; he takes it to be something given, about which there is no point in asking questions. Neither the teacher nor the student will question the reality of the angelic beings. Their intention is to describe their role and way of existence. What is new is his interpretation.

Eriugena's intellectual genealogy is shaped by his predecessors. He knows well the biblical passages describing acts of angels and their appearance (for example, those from Genesis or prophet Ezekiel). Next, he is familiar with the

14 "Dialogical epic" seems to be a *contradictio in adiecto*, if we agree with Bakhtin's famous distinction between the dialogical forms (polyglossia) and the epic forms ("close and deaf monoglossia"). See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in his *The Dialogic Imagination* (*Four Essays*), trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press 1981, pp. 12f. Eriugena is one of few dialogists who use that form of writing differently: the work is not an ironical derision of other ideas, but his explanations are meant very seriously.

15 "All," that is, including wicked people and angels, because Eriugena believe, that God cannot punish his creation, that is, Himself. Punishment is only a mental (self-)cathartic process; the hell is not some place, rather it is the annihilation of evil, but not of a human or angelic nature. "God," Deirdre Carabine writes, "does not punish the wicked; their own consciences do that for them." Deirdre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000, p. 100. Or as John Marenbon suggests, Eriugena is "someone who wished, in effect, to deny that anyone receives eternal punishment." John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge 2010, p. 81. See also Donald F. Duclow and Paul A. Dietrich, "Hell and Damnation in Eriugena," in *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time*, ed. by James McEvoy and Michael Dunne, Leuven: Leuven University Press 2002, pp. 347–366.

Platonic and Neoplatonic attitudes towards daemons, lower gods and heroes, celestial powers, and so on. His view was also shaped by the Christian tradition, especially by St. Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionisius. But there is a gap of at least three or more centuries between him and all these influences.

Eriugena is and, in some respect, is not a Neoplatonist. He adopted the basic elements of the Neoplatonic concept of emanation: there is unfolding and enfolding, there are degrees of heavenly hierarchies, there is the idea of returning to the original unity, there is a strong emphasis on eternal Oneness, there is a sense of contemplation—all this makes him a Neoplatonist. At the same time, he is not a Neoplatonist, because his attitude towards Nature differs from that of Plotinus, according to whom nature (φύσις) was only the lowest level of the visible world. By contrast, Eriugena deifies all the Nature.[16] He does this because he is a deeply faithful Christian who believes that God became flesh and descended to the earth to redeem man, that is, to bring everything back to the original Unity of Nature. Strictly speaking, not Eriugena, but Christ as the Word of God deifies here the whole world by his incarnation and redemption. Plotinus, Proclus, or Iamblichus would never claim this. Yet it was primarily them and their genuine philosophical spirituality that, mixed with a peculiar Christian message, constituted the support for Eriugena's own imaginative thinking.

When Karl Jaspers interprets Plotinus' philosophy, he rightly points out that he was not really interested in building *a system*. Plotinus is like a deeply believing pagan who looks to the One, prays alone to him alone (μόνους πρὸς μόνον),[17] elevates contemplative life above any political action that does not interest him in any way. It seems as if Plotinus is not interested in others; his notion of eternity does not consider the community of many.

Jaspers asks what Plotinus' goal is and answers right away that it is *the Unthinkable*. But how can one think what cannot be thought? Jaspers says: "Thinking presses to the limit that it cannot transcend but, in thinking this limit, spurs us to pass beyond it."[18] This spur, this impetus is in question: How does Plotinus know about that beyond, about the Unthinkable? He himself does not prove this, but even his (pagan or Christian) followers do not require proof. In

16 For Eriugena, this deification means the identification of everything with God, unlike his Christian predecessors who conceived deification rather as an assimilation to God. See Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy*, p. 81.

17 *Enn*. v, 1, 6, 12. (Plotinus, *Enneads* V, trans. by A. H. Armstrong, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann 1984.) See also Kevin Corrigan, "'Solitary' Mysticism in Plotinus, Proclus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Pseudo-Dionysius," *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 76, no. 1, 1996, pp. 28–42.

18 Karl Jaspers, *Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plotinus, Lao-tzu, Nagarjuna*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Ralph Manheim, New York and London: Harvest 1974, p. 42.

short, this is exactly the way it is with the world. But the Neoplatonists are not blind enthusiasts of Plotinus. One by one, they rethink his heritage of thought. Here they agree with him, there they oppose him; something suits them here, they part ways with him there. This can be clearly seen in the case of Proclus. Radek Chlup showed several differences between Proclus and Plotinus, and he claims: "Unlike Plotinus, Proclus was not a pure philosopher."[19] He was also interested in theurgy (Plotinus had no need to be in any close contact with the divine powers). Dealing with theurgy allowed him not to talk as much about the One as Plotinus did. Proclus wanted rather to keep quiet about the One, the Unthinkable and the Unspeakable. And Chlup in this connection adds:

> In addition, it is important to realize that Proclus' refusal to speak about the One does not result in intellectual resignation. On the contrary: if he finds the One as such altogether unknowable, it is all the more important for him to get a good grasp of all the other entities adjoining it, as well as of all the intermediate levels standing between the One and our world. The fact that there are theurgic techniques for approaching the One does not mean that we could dispense with philosophical investigation. Theurgy is only capable of bringing to fulfilment what was begun by intellectual means.[20]

However, Proclean theurgy opens the door wide for Christian interpretations of angels as intermediary beings between humans and the One, the God. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite was inspired by Proclus in many ways, and here he found the rational and cosmological base for his descriptions of angelic ranks.[21] No doubts, no questions, just explanations. God is no longer only the Unthinkable, but more-than-thinkable and at the same time more-than-unthinkable. What is simply thinkable, is all in-between, and if it is the

19 Radek Chlup, *Proclus*: *An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012, p. 57.

20 Chlup, *Proclus*: *An Introduction*, p. 61.

21 Let us note that in his commentary to Plato's *Republic* Proclus distinguished three mythical descriptions of celestial powers and their revelations: *the divine*, *the angelic* and *the daemonic*. (1) To the divine he ascribed being simple, one and unfolded (ἁπλουν—the divine itself never appears to people), (2) to the angelic he ascribed being universal (καθολικον) and being revealed without any determination of male or female, and (3) to the daemonic he ascribed being particular or singular (μερικόν) and being embodied with the concrete form of men, women, or even animals. See Proclus, *In Platonis Rem publicum commentarii*, in Radek Chlup, *Proklos*, Prague: Herrmann & synové 2009, pp. 356–357. The universality and male/female indeterminacy of the angels were also important for Eriugena's angelology, for whom angels are exemplars for humans, who after the Fall lost their original sexual indeterminacy.

thinkable, it is possible to speak about it. The canvas was spread out, the palette with colors was ready, all the intellectuals had to do was to start painting. The imagination game was in full swing.

But the path from the Pseudo-Dionysius to Eriugena was still long and winding. In the meantime, the notions of angels changed only a little, but there was always something added here and there. Gregory the Great took in his *Homily on Gospels* something from St. Augustine, maybe somehow from Pseudo-Dionysius,[22] Isidore of Seville took it from Gregory and added translation notes from Hieronymus, which we can find in his *Etymologies*, in the part called *De angelis* (*Etym.* VII, 5, 1–32). It is Isidore who borrows from Hieronymus an explanation of the painters' license (*pictorum licentia*) to depict angels with their wings and an explanation for why they not only move by them quickly in all directions, but in the case of the Seraphim they cover with their wings God's face and feet (or their own faces and feet) so that none of the other angels (including them) can see the Epiphany of the Supreme God. Eriugena himself will use the image of angelic wings as an original allegoric interpretation of the meaning of the wings of the highest angels (Seraphim), which he will explain as their way of contemplation:

> For their wings are the contemplations by which they are represented to veil their feet and their faces, fearing to behold the manner in which the Holy Trinity and Indivisible Unity is poured down through all things from the highest to the lowest, and how it passes all understanding, and is removed from every creature, whether visible or invisible, into the infinite heights of its Nature. And yet purified human beings as well as angels are always and incessantly seeking to behold it, a thing which in itself they cannot contemplate, and it is this which is signified by the flight of the medial wings. This is why Scripture says: "Upon Whom the angels desire to gaze."[23]

22 It is unclear, as Richard Sowerby shows, whether Gregory the Great could have known the Pseudo-Dionysius, because he was known for his ignorance of Greek. Nevertheless, Sowerby adds: "Pope Gregory's homily was for many centuries the only sustained treatment of angels available in early medieval Europe." Richard Sowerby, *Angels in Early Medieval England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016, p. 7. Similarly, Paul Rorem claims: "When it came to ordering heaven, even the great Pope Gregory took second place to Dionysius for most of the medieval authors… Although Gregory spent six years in Constantinople and refers to Dionysius regarding the angels, his presentation of them does not show much explicit Dionysian influence." Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, pp. 74–75.

23 *PP*, II, 615A.

Isidore of Seville had a great influence on the Carolingian period, especially on Theodulf of Orleans.[24] Undoubtedly, Alcuin of York and other intellectuals of the period also read his writings. All of this reinforced the Christian imagination of angels. John Scottus Eriugena entered this rich figurative world with his own original contribution.[25]

3 Eriugena and Angels

Paul Rorem in his commentary to the Pseudo-Dionysius wrote quoting Eriugena:

> Despite his condemnation much later, it was Eriugena's use of these very chapters of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, as he combined them with the Augustinian tradition, that influenced the medieval way of interpreting symbols, especially artistic beauty. For Eriugena, "every visible and invisible creature can be called a theophany, that is, a divine apparition" or "a self-manifestation of God." This means that the world as a whole is a metaphor for God, and must be interpreted anagogically as an uplifting to God. "For everything that is understood and sensed is nothing else but the apparition of what is not apparent, the manifestation of the hidden, the affirmation of the negated, the comprehension of the incomprehensible." … Because he viewed existence or being itself as a theophany and the world as metaphor, he also could view art as anagogy, more explicitly than Dionysius ever did. Art, properly understood, was spiritually uplifting or anagogical.[26]

24 See Laura Carlson, "Adoption, Adaptation, and Authority: The Use of Isidore in the *Opus Caroli*," in *Isidore of Seville and his Reception in the Early Middle Ages: Transmitting and Transforming Knowledge*, ed. by Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2016, pp. 209–230.

25 According to Ritva Palmén, Eriugena's notion of imagination is not complete because it "refers to the images, not to the ability to imagine," and "thus the precise theory of imagination (*imaginatio, phantasia*) as the soul's ability to interpret symbols, signs, or similitudes is incomplete in this respect in the composition by Eriugena." Ritva Palmén, *Richard of St. Victor's Theory of Imagination*, Leiden: Brill 2014, p. 220. However, let us add that Eriugena's intention is not to be a theoretician of imagination or of other cognitive functions.

26 Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence*, pp. 79–80.

The note has several important points: it refers to the importance of theophany in Eriugena, his anagogic hermeneutics and related aesthetics, as well as his Neoplatonic ontology. For Eriugena, St. Augustine's image of the City of God, the communion to which humans and angels should return in the magnificent finale of Unification with God, is an essential determination in the anagogic interpretation. But since both the visible and the invisible world are in fact the theophanies of the only God, and every theophany at a higher ontological level is getting closer to perfection, so forming a community with what is ontologically higher is according to Eriugena a guarantee of the right way to the Return.[27]

Of course, we can see here the renewed formation of the metaphysics of light, which will have a great influence on the thinking of other medieval authors. However, it is not just about some homogeneous and equally radiant light, but rather about a source and what emanates from it. This radiation gradually weakens, but even the last, weakest part of the rays remains part of the light. This role of the intensity of experience close to the source and the weakening of the intensity when moving away from the source, took various forms. The idea of such an imagination of the intensity of a source and its different degrees is very Plotinian. The closer I get to an event, the more intensely I experience it (although sometimes a more exact interpretation is afforded by a greater distance); the closer I am to the light source, the more I see (unless, of course, the excess brightness blinds me); the more I move around the original text, the clearer I experience the author's intentions in contrast to the derived versions or commentaries of the same text.

This concept is also crucial for Eriugena, with whom he may have had experience as a direct translator of Greek texts, such as those by Pseudo-Dionysius. Eriugena lives in a time when it was still believed that Pseudo-Dionysius was a disciple of Paul the Apostle (despite some very popular doubts in Paris),[28] and therefore his work only confirmed what philosophers found in the texts of

27 Although Eriugena puts much more emphasis on theophany than his Neoplatonic predecessors, the notion of theophany still plays a big role in their writings. As Eric D. Perl claims: "For Dionysius, then, as for Plotinus and Proclus, the whole of reality, all that is, is theophany, the manifestation or appearance of God." Eric D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, New York: State University of New York Press 2007, p. 32.

28 Although in Eriugena's time it was debated whether Dionysius was the Parisian martyr St. Denis, it seems, that Eriugena never supported this claim, and, as Paul Rorem suggests, he used to pass over the issue in silence. See Paul Rorem, *Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies 2005, pp. 13–15.

the Neoplatonists. Reading (and being able to read) the Pseudo-Dionysian *corpus* meant approaching the source of Wisdom, which was Christ. Reading the Pseudo-Dionysius meant overcoming one of the first stages of the Return—to be closer to the Source.

We could find similar thinking about a role of light in Marsilio Ficino's *De lumine*, but in a slightly shifted Renaissance context, influenced mainly by Plato's *Symposium*, Plotinus, and Proclus. According to Ficino, beauty is *splendor per gradus desuper emicans*.[29] However, for Ficino, light emissions are no longer a challenge to return from physical darkness to the source of light, but to realize actual oneness with the source. Ficino says that in visible things we can see what is invisible as in a mirror (*speculum*) and a riddle or an enigma (as Paul the Apostle says), but at the end of his treatment he writes that light passes through us and spreads further. The point is that people from whom the rays of light of the mind or the physical gaze are cast onto others, expand this brightness in one another. And thus, in the final analysis, God as *Sol in stellis* will shine happily in all.[30] Ficino's imaginative world is different from Eriugena's: there is no return, only releasing and expanding light in this created world. Eriugena and Ficino represents two different metaphysics of light, two different types of an imaginative world, and therefore two different forms of the spiritual life.

From what we have written so far, it seems that it is the imagination that establishes the way of spirituality, because as we understand the universe and imagine its invisible parts, we subsequently adjust the ways of our relationship with the divine—of course if we are willing to admit its existence and personal being. If so, then spirituality is the daughter of the imagination. Does this look like blasphemy? Maybe, but does it contradict the Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum*?

Let us return to Eriugena. John J. Contreni in his contribution to the thinking of Irish philosopher writes as follow:

> In the second chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius explained that the Scriptures used poetic fictions to describe the angels, pure spirits, in simple terms. John Scottus' understanding of this passage enabled him to personify the Scriptures as an Artist (*Artifex Scriptura*). He seemed to want to recall Martianus Capella to the minds of readers of his *Expositions on the Celestial Hierarchy* when he wrote that poetic art through fictitious fables and allegories ("per fictas fabulas allegoricasque similitudines")

29 Ficino, *De lumine*, 14, 983 (Marsilio Ficino, *O Slunci, O světle*/*De Sole, De lumine*, the bilingual Latin-Czech edition, Prague: Oikoymenh 2017.)

30 Ficino, *De lumine*, 17, 986.

> lifted the mind to deeper moral teachings and to truths about the natural world. So, too, Theology, like a poetess ("ita, theologia ueluti quedam poetria") uses imaginary fictions (*fictis imaginationibus*) to bring humans to higher truths.[31]

He who says this must know the difference between figurative and conceptual language. Undoubtedly, Eriugena understood the difference. Although the term *biblia pauperum* did not yet exist, images and parables differed from conceptual expression as *mythos* from *logos*. *Periphyseon* is an imitation of Alcuin's concept of the established school dialogue between teacher (*nutritor*, the nourishing) and student (*alumnus*, the nourished). The student here is not a beginner or a layman, but a relatively well-educated adept of philosophy. Does he need such an education through images, mirrors, or enigmas?

The image of nutrition may be conceived as the guiding thread of this dialogue. School is understood here as feeding, education means not only learning, but it has a dietary character. In this respect, an uneducated person is a malnourished being or someone fed a bad diet. And if we move this metaphor into the anagogic and Augustinian interpretation typical for Eriugena,[32] people also need educators who will teach them to eat the "bread of angels."

Recall the later significance of the metaphor of feeding (or lactation) as education in St. Bernard of Clairvaux, when in the twelfth century he argued in his *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum* (XLI, 6) that sweet kisses of personal contemplation should be discontinued or interrupted for the sake of breastfeeding children, because, as Bernard says, no one should live only for himself but rather for all. The metaphor of the kisses and then the nursing of children as an active role of motherhood represents here first and foremost the Church and her Bridegroom Christ: the kisses are a contemplation of bliss in gazing,

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31 John J. Contreni, "John Scottus, *Nutritor*, and the Liberal Arts," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. by Adrian Guiu, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2020, p. 61.

32 Elizabeth Klein in her study on St. Augustine's understanding of the humans–angels' community in the *City of God* compares angels as exemplars in Christian culture to the role of heroes (who are often conceived as celestial powers) in ancient cultures: "Likewise, in *City of God*, Augustine comments that the heroic acts of which pagans were capable for the glory of Rome should pale in comparison with that which a Christian can accomplish when mindful of the glory of heaven and the company of angels." Elizabeth Klein, *Augustine's Theology of Angels*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018, p. 84. By thematizing angels as heroes, St. Augustine also develops a new subjective role of human being: to imitate their heroes and become like them. In the words of Jon Stewart: "Augustine, along with other Christian saints, constitutes a new kind of hero." Jon Stewart, *The Emergence of Subjectivity in the Ancient and Medieval World: An Interpretation of Western Civilization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020, p. 329.

but the relationship of the two lovers is interpreted by Bernard in the spirit of the medieval goal of partnership, which is the procreation of children. If a mother merely gazed dreamily at her husband, forgetting her children, her relationship with her bridegroom would become a selfish fulfillment of her own desire. But as a mother, she is also responsible for feeding her children. Bernard understood this image as the nurturing and educational role of the Church. Shortly before this passage, he even attributed a similar role to the angels in relation to human beings. Many medieval paintings of Madonnas with a naked breast and a stream of milk (of heavenly food) were an artistic response to this metaphor.

The remark about education is directly related to Eriugena's understanding of angels, not only as messengers and protectors, but also as educators. When he explains why angels sometimes take the form of human beings (neither male nor female, but universal), they do so "not for their own sakes, but for the sake of those men of whom they are in charge and to whom they declare the mysteries of God."[33] Eriugena's distinction between wisdom and science can also be better understood here: "For the proper definition of wisdom is that power by which the contemplative mind, whether human or angelic, *contemplates* the eternal and immutable things of God….But science is the power by which the contemplative mind, whether human or angelic, *discourses* on the nature of [these] things…[34] In other words: Wisdom is a subjective spiritual relation to the Divine—a vision of God.[35] Science is an intersubjective relation between created beings. As the teacher is the interpreter of the wisdom for his disciple, so the angels, like the older brothers of men,[36] are the interpreters, and thus the revealers of the mysteries of God. Men should learn from the angels what it means to contemplate God, that is to be fed by his bread. Such an image of dietary education is a further part of Eriugena's deep spirituality.

In Eriugena angels are intermediate beings between God and humans, but rather in a spiritual than a cosmological sense. According to him, the original

33 *PP*, IV, 773B.

34 *PP*, III, 629A; my emphasis.

35 According to Eriugena, the desire to see God is a fundamental contemplative feature of angels, emphasizing that they do not see God directly, but only his theophanies (*PP*, I, 448C). And even the angels of the highest rank cover their faces with their wings because they tremble before the direct view of God (*PP*, II, 615A), and at the same time they block lower angels from seeing Him directly, and thus they protect them. God himself remains invisible. The desire to see the Invisible (hidden beyond the clouds and thus unknowable) distinguishes Eriugena from Pseudo-Dionysius, as Deirdre Carabine stresses: "the eyes of the intellect [*in Eriugena's case*] are open, even though they do not see the hidden essence of the divine nature." Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena*, Louvain, Peeters Press 1995, p. 320.

36 *PP*, V, 1005A.

humans in Paradise were created like angels, but after the Fall they were obliged to accept *a shameful* difference of males and females with their abominable beast-like and corruptible way of procreation. Like Plotinus, Eriugena is ashamed of his body and of the way he came into the world, and he recalls this several times in his work. A man in his terrestrial being is for him a *risible animal*.[37] According to him, authentic humanity has an angelic form because the human being is "the universal creature,"[38] and thus, there still can be something angelic in humans,[39] for even God "gives to perfect human nature the quality of *absolute freedom* from all limitations."[40] The angel here is the prototype of the original man, who has not yet been sexually divided. Eriugena dreams and longs to return, which will free him from any sexual qualifications.[41]

Although Eriugena's angels are declared as asexual beings, all indications are that the Irish philosopher imagined them in a masculine rather than a feminine form. He perceived the woman as the Creator's "Plan B," as a solution to the situation after the Fall. Man was created in the image of God, but woman as punishment for his transgression.[42] Strong words! These are not very flattering aspects of Eriugena's work, even if here and there he defends women from the attacks of men who passed the blame for the fall of humanity on the flesh to women, because it is said commonly that the Devil seduced people through woman's fault. Eriugena rejects such an interpretation: man is responsible for his own fall.[43] But he adds later what is his image of woman: "the sinning soul who in her fatal lustfulness bursts through the corporeal sense into the love of sensible things. And the ancient enemy would not have had access to the male

37 *PP*, I, 444B.

38 Dermot Moran, "John Scottus Eriugena," in *An Introduction to Medieval Theology*, ed. by Rik van Nieuwenhove, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012, pp. 68–69.

39 *PP*, III, 733C: "So you will find many things in man which the angelic nature totally rejects, whereas there is nothing in the angel nor in any other creature which is not naturally present in man." Recall that we find a more radical statement in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in his *De hominis dignitate*: "let us compete with the angels in dignity and glory. When we have willed it, we shall be not at all below them." Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. by Charles Glenn Wallis, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company 1965, p. 7.

40 Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990, p. 163. In another paper Moran writes: "Eriugena understands man as possessing a boundless freedom of choice, the perfect mirror of God's infinite and boundless freedom," by which he calls God as *anarchos*. Dermot Moran, "'The Secret Folds of Nature': Eriugena's Expansive Concept of Nature," in *Re-Imagining Nature: Environmental Humanities and Ecosemiotics*, ed. by Alfred Kentigern Siewers, Lanham: Bucknell University Press 2014, p. 122.

41 *PP*, V, 896C.

42 *PP*, IV, 818A.

43 *PP*, IV, 845D.

part of the soul, that is, the mind, which is created in the image of God, unless first he had seduced the corporeal sense, which is, so to speak, a woman."[44]

The spiritual bodies of the angels, whether asexual or in the form of some original male bodies (who knows how he imagined them), are the next part of the imaginative world of celestial beings in Eriugena. Following his way of thinking, we might conclude that while we cannot doubt his deep spirituality (and likewise we cannot call into question Plotinus' deep spirituality), it nevertheless seems that our ways of spirituality are always influenced by our imagination, especially if it focuses on presumed invisible parts of the universe. And thus, is there no place for spirituality purified from images?

4 Is Pure Spirituality Possible without Imagination?

Our knowledge of the world, our rationality, determines to a large extent how we are willing to think imaginatively about things for which our rational thinking is not enough and whether we assume that there is something in our world that transcends us. But doesn't that then mean that we adapt our spirituality to the changing scientific worldview? Isn't it then the case that science nurtures our imagination?

In an interview with Raimon Panikkar, the Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapide asked whether by constantly confronting biblical descriptions with scientific facts, we end up constantly adjusting or editing what we believe.[45] Does this mean that we should keep the spiritual imagination in its own realm? Does this mean that the gap between our imaginations and scientific facts should remain open? Does this mean that religions are freed from changing scientific paradigms only because their imagination is the fruit of their traditions?

Immanuel Kant believed that all religions are just particular forms of religious life that will gradually evolve into a higher form of "universal Church," that is "an ethical community" that will no longer be confessional, but moral.[46] Others (such as Anthony Steinbock)[47] have responded to this suggestion that it would be a reduction of religion to ethics. There would be no difference between moral and spiritual life (in the religious sense), and morality would engulf spirituality.

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44 *PP*, IV, 847C.

45 Pinchas E. Lapide, Raimon Panikkar, *Meinen wir denselben Gott? Ein Streitgespräch*, Munich: Kösel 1994.

46 Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. and ed. by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, pp. 111–112.

47 Anthony J. Steinbock, "Reducing the One to the Other: Kant, Levinas, and the Problem of Religious Experience," *Levinas Studies: An Annual Review*, vol. 4, 2009, pp. 127–156.

We could call spirituality without images mystical, but it is the history of mysticism that tells us stories about the excess of mystical imagery, which reaches even the level of sublimated erotic poetics. Spirituality without imagination seems to be a pure silence. But what exactly will this silence be? What will notions like prayer or God mean in it? How could any religion be based on spiritual silence? It would be reminiscent of Plotinus and his blissful view towards the One, but, as we have seen, Plotinus nourished his pagan spirituality with his own emanative imagination.

Of course, we can also understand spirituality in a non-religious sense. For example, as when Max Scheler distinguished between the physical, psychical, and spiritual levels in a personal life of man. Or we can reach for Patočka's lecture "The Spiritual Person and the Intellectual,"[48] in which the spiritual man is not understood at all as a religious believer, but as a man thinking, deep and perpetually restless. According to Patočka, the intellectual knows a lot, but the world of the spiritual man determines *the non-self-evidence*. Philosophers, even if they are unbelievers, do not want to stop talking about themselves as spiritual people, even if they have various things in minds when saying this. And yet, are philosophers deprived of imaginative ability? Are they forbidden to live in images that are for them metaphors, allegories, parables? Don't they use some proper images to tell others what their spiritual life in thinking means? Doesn't Patočka tell us about philosophical insight as a lightning that for a brief moment will break the darkness?

Imagination has a history. It needs to be cultivated, and its fruits will be new forms of spirituality, both religious and non-religious. In the case of John Scottus Eriugena, we saw one of these examples, taken from the nineth century, but with a long-lasting influence on later art and philosophy. Contemporary religious thinking experienced through the new spirituality and imagination can continue to retain the figures of angels as a part of its faith. They may no longer be hierarchically arranged in higher and lower ranks, they may no longer fly between the celestial spheres (since there are no such spheres), they may no longer have wings, but rather will be wingless like those of Marc Chagall. It is possible that they will remain personal; it is possible to ascribe to them the role of messengers and interpreters, but they may not have white tunics, a sweet and eunuch look, and hands folded in the pious gothic manner. The situation is similar with the Unspeakable: this idea will always provoke our language to use enchanting images. Looking for adequate words or images is a hermeneutical process, and the role of hermeneuticians is the same as was that of angels.

48 Jan Patočka, "The Spiritual Person and the Intellectual," in his *Living in Problematicity*, ed. by Eric Manton, Prague: Oikoymenh 2007, pp. 51–69.

Deirdre Carabine describes in the epilogue of her *The Unknown God* one situation when she was unsuccessfully looking for the kingfisher's ineffable color.[49] And it shouldn't surprise us that it was the kingfisher, too, who was the first childish bird of fire (Phoenix) for a great teacher of the imagination, Gaston Bachelard, for whom the little bird was "blue as a hot iron." We can understand his spirituality very well when we read this: "The great phoenixes, whose glory I admired in mythical stories, lived for a year, they lived for a hundred years. This mine, this ours could only last a moment. But what a moment that symbolizes the pinnacle of happiness!"[50] Maybe the kingfisher will become a new winged creature (alongside owls, ravens, bats, or even angels) in the philosophical "ornithology." And maybe it would be enough if it will be only another subject of deep philosophical meditations about the inadequacy of our language.

In a word, our spirituality (believing or atheistic) is still a sign of the extent to which our imagination is cultivated.

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49 See Carabine, *The Unknown God*, p. 323.

50 Gaston Bachelard, *Fragments d'une Poétique du Feu*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France 1988, pp. 65–66.

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CHAPTER 7

Approaches to the Knowledge of God in Classical Islamic Thought

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In honor of Hugo Hiriart

Abstract

This article explores and discusses different approaches—the theological, the philosophical, and the Sufi—to the knowledge and experience of God within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Throughout the discussion the question that arises is to what kind of knowledge or experience of God do each of these approaches lead. The *mutakallimūn* (theologians) and the philosophers formulate convincing arguments for the existence of God and His nature. However, the deductive reasoning they both employ has its limits, and their methods contrast with theoretical or speculative Sufism, whose aim is to engage deeply in the systematic account of the experiential knowledge of God. After revising the scope of the arguments for the existence of God of al-Ashʿarī and al-Ghazālī, and then, the arguments of some Peripatetic philosophers of the Islamic classical period, I focus the debate on the contrast between the deductive reasoning and the intuitive knowledge of God according to theoretical or speculative Sufism, introducing Suhrawardī and Ibn ʿArabī. Finally, the article concludes with some remarks and a brief disquisition on what could be the correct path to the knowledge of God.

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This article explores and discusses several accounts of approaching God within the Classical Islamic intellectual tradition (ca.750–1258). All of them have something in common: they conceive God (*Allāh*) as the creator and governor of the entire universe. And, as the Holy Qurʾān teaches, they assume that God is one (*aḥad*), unique (*wāḥid*), and is characterized by His oneness (*tawḥīd*). In the mid-eighth century, the controversies between Middle Eastern Christians and Muslims gave rise to a discipline known as *ʿilm al-kalām* (literally, science

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of religious discourse), usually translated as Islamic theology.[1] The founders of this discipline were the Muʿtazilites, a group of rationalist religious thinkers, and their rivals were the early tenth century school known as the Ashʿarites. The Ashʿarites conceived reason as an instrument for defending religious doctrines without altering, reinterpreting, or innovating the original meaning of Qurʾānic doctrines, which is what they accused the Muʿtazilites of doing.[2]

Besides the nature of God and His message as contained in the Qurʾān, the main concerns of the exponents of *kalām*, namely the *mutakallimūn*, were the divine attributes, the creation of the world, the nature of created beings, the critical approach to natural causality, predestination, and free will. The discussions of these matters started with the Muʿtazilites even before the advent of philosophy (*falsafa*). In fact, everything suggests that some Muʿtazilite ideas shaped the formative period of philosophical thought. By the end of the eighth century, with the arrival of Greek philosophical works to Islamic lands,[3] several thinkers became interested in the study of this new discipline,

1 See Josef van Ess, "The Beginnings of Islamic Theology," in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning: Proceedings of the First International Colloquium on Philosophy, Science, and Theology in the Middle Ages*, ed. by John Emery Murdoch and Edith Dudley Syll, Dordrecht: D. Reidel 1975; pp. 87–119; Harry Wolfson. *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1976; Michael Cook, "The Origins of Kalām," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1980, pp. 32–43; Richard M. Frank, "The Science of Kalām," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1992, pp. 7–37; Oliver Leaman and Sajjad Rizvi, "The Developed Kalām Tradition (Part I and Part II)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. by Tim Winter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 pp. 77–96; Alexander Treiger, "Origins of Kalām," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. by Sabine Schmidtke, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016, pp. 27–43.

2 Josef van Ess, "Muʿtazilah," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Mircea Eliade, 10:220–229, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company 1987, vol. 10, pp. 220–229; Richard M. Frank, "Contrastes entre trois systèmes: Muʿtazilisme, Ashʿarisme et Ghazālī," *Les Cahiers de Tunisie*, vol. 49, no. 173, 1996, pp. 87–104; David Bennett, "The Muʿtazilite Movement (II): The Early Muʿtazilites," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. by Sabine Schmidtke, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016, pp. 142–158; Jan Thiele, "Between Cordoba and Nīsābūr: The Emergence and Consolidation of Ashʿarism (Fourth–Fifth/Tenth–Eleventh Century)," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, pp. 225–241. And more recently, the first two volumes of four by Hans Daiber in collaboration with Helga Daiber, *From the Greeks to the Arabs and Beyond. Volume 1: Graeco-Syriaca and Arabica*, Leiden: Brill 2021; and *From the Greeks to the Arabs and Beyond. Volume 2: Islamic Philosophy*, Leiden: Brill, 2021.

3 Gerhard Endress, "The Circle of Al-Kindī: Early Arabic Translations from the Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosophy," in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism: Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences Dedicated to H.J. Drossaart Lulofs on His Ninetieth Birthday*, ed. by Gerhard Endress and Remke Kruk, Leiden: Research School CNWS 1997, pp. 43–76; Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)*, London: Routledge 1998.

finding concepts and argumentative tools to strengthen their proofs for the existence and nature of God and the creation of the world. In the ninth century, al-Kindī (d.873) began to compose philosophical works in some cases showing intellectual affinity with Muʿtazilite ideas.[4] Nevertheless, unlike the *mutakallimūn*, al-Kindī managed a philosophical project based on Neoplatonic and Aristotelian sources, thus inaugurating philosophy in Islamic lands.

Philosophers who succeeded al-Kindī, such as al-Fārābī (d.950), Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d.1037), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198), increasingly conceived of philosophy as an autonomous and independent discipline, which nonetheless also dealt with religious issues.[5] In many cases, there were tensions between the *kalāmic* and the philosophical approaches to religious issues. While practitioners of *kalām* focused on exegesis and apologetics as their primary approaches to religious doctrines, philosophers viewed their discipline as the understanding of reality through reason. Thus, philosophers were not necessarily committed to defending any particular *kalāmic* view. They were, however, concerned with investigating certain religious issues, such as the existence and nature of God.

Philosophers were trying to harmonize Greek philosophy with monotheistic beliefs, and most of them were convinced that both philosophy and religion were committed to the truth. Hence, in general terms they assumed that there could be no conflict between both philosophy and religion. In fact, for most of them, philosophy and religion shared the same contents, but they used different types of discourse: while philosophy uses demonstrative arguments directed to a scholarly audience, religious discourse is built on symbols and metaphors intended to persuade ordinary people. *Kalām*, as a discipline that was at the service of religion, did not use demonstrations either, but only dialectical or rhetorical arguments. For this reason, philosophers considered *kalām* to be methodologically inferior to philosophy.

Besides the *kalāmic* and philosophical approaches, there is also Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), a practical approach to Islam which, instead of focusing on doctrinal theoretical matters, deals with Islamic legal rulings inferred from the Qur'ān and the *sunna* (the teachings of the Prophet). Around the eighth century and perhaps even a little earlier, there were already juridical discussions that gave rise to several schools. Here I will not discuss the juridical approach.

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4 Peter Adamson, "Al-Kindī and the Muʿtazila: Divine Attributes, Creation and Freedom," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2013, pp. 45–77.

5 See Rafael Ramón Guerrero, "¿Qué es la filosofía en la cultura árabe?," in *Miscellanea Medievalia, Band 26: Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter*, ed. by Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1998, pp. 257–270.

Suffice it to say that the focus of Islamic jurisprudence is the interpretation of the sources as a means of extracting the principles and rules necessary for the regulation of the practical life of every Muslim.[6]

In addition to *kalām*, *falsafa*, and *fiqh*, there is a fourth approach, namely *taṣawwuf* or Sufism, identified as Islamic mysticism. Sufism emerged around the eighth or ninth centuries, as a confluence of Greek, Christian, Persian and even Indian ideas and practices. Beyond its external influences and its sometimes controversial views, Sufism is deeply rooted in the Qurʾānic teachings. It is not easy—and perhaps it is impossible—to provide a universal definition of Sufism.[7] The reason is that Sufism is strongly linked to the varieties of spiritual practices whose purpose is to achieve the knowledge of God by means of *dhawq* (taste) and *maʿrifa* (experiential knowledge), that is, an intuition of God through created things, and the spiritual experience of God. Furthermore, there is a practical esoteric dimension of Islamic mysticism, and a theoretical or speculative dimension which consists of a "philosophical" description of mysticism. For this reason, it is common to find the terms "philosophical Sufism" or Sufi wisdom (*ḥikma*) in scholarly literature. Even though theoretical Sufism can be considered philosophical, it is different from the deductive reasoning used in Peripatetic philosophy (*falsafa*). Despite the diversity that characterizes the practices and teachings of the Sufis, there are elaborate systematic expressions of the contents of the spiritual and mystical experience. One of the greatest presentations and descriptions of the Sufi spiritual experience is Ibn ʿArabī's (d.1240) monumental work, *The Meccan Openings* (*al-Futūhāt al-makkiyya*).[8]

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6 See Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997; Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005; Peter Adamson (ed.), *Philosophy and Jurisprudence in the Islamic World*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2019.

7 The available scholarly literature on Sufism and concretely on philosophical Sufism is boundless. A few helpful studies to assimilate what I present here as philosophical Sufism are Ayman Shihadeh (ed.), *Sufism and Theology*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2007; Anna Akasoy, "What is Philosophical Sufism?," in *In the Age of Averroes in the Sixth/Twelfth Century*, ed. by Peter Adamson, London: The Warburg Institute 2011, pp. 229–249; Mohammed Rustom, "Philosophical Sufism," in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, ed. by Richard C. Taylor and Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, London and New York: Routledge 2016, pp. 399–411; Hans Daiber in collaboration with Helga Daiber, *From the Greeks to the Arabs and Beyond. Volume 3: From God's Wisdom to Science: A. Islamic Theology and Sufism; B. History of Science*, Leiden: Brill, 2021.

8 See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt al-makkiyya*, 1911 Cairo edition (rep. Beirut: Dār Sādir, n.d.). There is also the 14 vols., ed. by Osman Yahia, Cairo: al-Hayʾat al-Misriyyat al-ʿĀmma li al-Kitāb, 1972–1991. In the third section, I will refer to some passages translated by William Chittick.

In what follows I shall only characterize three different ways—the *kalāmic*, the philosophical, and the theoretical or speculative Sufism—of understanding the way in which human beings might be able to think of and relate to God. My aim is to discuss the contrasting accounts of God within the Islamic context. The Ashʿarite *mutakallimūn* explored doctrinal matters articulating rational explanations of religious issues while acknowledging the limits of human understanding. For their part, most philosophers—concretely those influenced by Aristotelian or Peripatetic ideas—aimed to articulate religious propositions in accordance with logical demonstrations. In contrast to the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers, the exponents of Sufism take a different path, in which neither deductive reasoning nor logical demonstrations are seen as sufficient for reaching a true knowledge of God. Sufism seeks to know God through a personal experience that can be reached through ascetism and spiritual practices. Nevertheless, the theoretical and systematic expressions of the Sufi spiritual experiences, as I shall show, redefined philosophical vocabulary.

Kalām, *falsafa*, and *taṣawwuf* share a common interest, namely, the unraveling of how human beings can know God. As I said before, for the *mutakallimūn* and the Peripatetic philosophers the knowledge of God is closely connected to logical arguments. Yet, while in the case of the *mutakallimūn* logical arguments are used to defend the coherence of the Qurʾānic revelation, most Peripatetic philosophers interpret religious propositions in light of deductive reasoning and logical arguments. Most *mutakallimūn*—Muʿtazilites and Ashʿarites—trust human reason, but they do not reduce the religious experience to deductive reasoning: worship (*ʿibada*)—that is rites, rituals, morals, and customs—is a crucial part of religion. For their part, most Peripatetic philosophers struggled to harmonize the relationship between philosophy and religion. By contrast, the Sufis focused on the *maʿrifa*, intuitive or experiential knowledge, rather than on the deductive reasoning and logical argumentations of the *mutakallimūn* and philosophers. Put simply, for the Sufis pure reason falls short of the spiritual experience of God.

The Qurʾān is not concerned with providing proofs for the existence of God. The Sacred Book takes for granted that God exists, and in its *suras* it insists that there is no other God besides Allah. The proofs for the existence of God are supposed to be found in the works and treatises produced by Islamic intellectuals. Nevertheless, in an excellent recent publication, Hannah C. Erlwein has argued the contrary to what a considerable number of scholarly publications have shown.[9] While there is abundant literature devoted to discussing the

9 Hannah C. Erlwein, *Arguments for God's Existence in Classical Islamic Thought*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2019.

arguments for the existence of God in classical Islamic thought, Erlwein argues that the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers did not seek to prove that God exists. According to her thesis, while the classical arguments for the existence of God in the Western tradition seek to prove that there is an entity, namely God, in addition to the world, Islamic arguments take for granted both, God and the world, right from the beginning as part of the reality. Erlwein's point is very suggestive and broadens the debate around a crucial topic.[10] Here, I will put the discussion in slightly different terms: to talk about God implies talking about creation and, if the starting point is creation itself as a product of God's action, then the arguments for the existence of God do not exactly prove God's existence, but serve as a confirmation that the existence of the world implies the existence of God or a first cause or existent.

My interest is not to analyze the logical consistency of the arguments for God's existence formulated by the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers. Regardless of whether or not those arguments are conclusive, what I want to raise is the question of their epistemological role: to what kind of knowledge or experience of God do these arguments lead? If we review some of the most common arguments within the *kalāmic* and philosophical literature we will find the same attempt: to formulate convincing arguments for the existence of God and His nature. However, the deductive reasoning of the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers has its limits, and their methods contrast with Sufi doctrines, whose aim is to engage deeply in the experiential knowledge of God.

In the four sections that follow, I first discuss the arguments of two relevant Ashʿarite *mutakallimūn* for the existence of God, which are deeply connected with God's act *par excellence*, namely, creation. After presenting the arguments of al-Ashʿarī (d.935/936), I turn to al-Ghazālī (d.1111) as an example of a thinker who engaged with deductive reasoning and yet, at some point in his life came to realize the limitations of the *kalāmic* method. Then, in the second section, I deal with the idea of God as first or primary cause from the philosophical standpoint, through the views and arguments some of the most known Peripatetic philosophers of the Islamic classical period. In the third section, I focus the discussion on the contrast between the deductive reasoning of the *mutakallimūn* and the Peripatetic philosophers, and the intuitive knowledge of God according to theoretical or speculative Sufism. In this same section, I introduce Suhrawardī (d.1191) and his eclectic philosophy of illumination, as an

10 For another recent study on the relevance of the proofs for the existence of God, see Ulrich Rudolph and Roman Seidel, "The Philosophical Proof for God's Existence between Europe and the Islamic World: Reflections on an Entangled History of Philosophy and its Contemporary Relevance," *Asiatische Studien*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2019, pp. 57–88.

example of an Islamic thinker who linked philosophy (*falsafa*) and mysticism. Suhrawardī criticized Peripatetic philosophy, but at the same time preserved some philosophical elements that he integrated into his mystical approach. In this section, I also discuss some of the ontological views of Ibn ʿArabī as an example of how Sufi doctrines were systematically expressed by redefining philosophical vocabulary. Finally, I conclude with some remarks and a brief discussion on what could be the correct path to the knowledge of God.

1 God and Creation: Kalāmic Arguments

A careful, detailed examination of all the arguments used by the *mutakallimūn* to prove the existence of God and describe the divine nature would be too ambitious for an article such as this. Fortunately, Josef van Ess (d. 2021), one of the most widely recognized contemporary *kalām* scholars, has already done much of that work for us in his monumental four-volume work, written in German but recently translated into English.[11] For this reason, I shall only discuss some of the arguments of two Ashʿarite theologians, Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ashʿarī and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.[12]

In one of his best-known treatises, *The Luminous Book* (*Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*),[13] al-Ashʿarī, the founder of the school bearing his name, raises a number of questions to which he responds through a series of arguments that are at first sight very convincing. In the first chapter, he promptly asks for a proof (*dalīl*) that creation (*khalq*) has a creator (*ṣāniʿ*) and an arranger (*mudabbir*). The proof is an explanation of the development of semen to a complete human being with flesh, bones, and blood. The transformation from one state (*ḥāl*) to another, that is, from semen to an embryo, to a fetus, and finally the coming to be of a

11 See Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of the Religious Thought in Early Islam*, vol. 1, trans. by John O'Kane, Leiden: Brill 2017; *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of the Religious Thought in Early Islam*, vol. 2, trans. by Gwendolin Goldbloom, Leiden: Brill 2017; *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of the Religious Thought in Early Islam*, vol. 3, trans. by Gwendolin Goldbloom, Leiden: Brill 2018; Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of the Religious Thought in Early Islam*, vol. 4, trans. by Gwendolin Goldbloom, Leiden: Brill 2019.

12 For the relation between al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarites see Richard M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashaʿrite School*, Durham: Duke University Press 1994; Michael Marmura, "Ghazali and Ashʿarism Revisited," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2002, pp. 91–110.

13 Al-Ashʿarī, *The Arabic Texts of Al-Ashʿari's Kitāb Al-Lumaʿ and Risālat Istiḥsān Al-Khawḍ Fī ʿIlm Al-Kalām*, ed. and trans. by Richard J. McCarthy, Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique 1953.

complete human being, is not due to a voluntary human act. Human beings are unable to come to be by themselves, or to create any physical member by themselves. All these changes can be explained only through the intervention by a creator and arranger who brings them about. Just as a piece of cotton cannot be transformed into clothing without a weaver, nor can clay be transformed into a castle without the intervention of a builder, so semen cannot be transformed into a human being without a maker.[14]

In response to the possibility that semen has eternally pre-existed, al-Ashʿarī argues that what is eternal cannot change or adopt characteristics other than those it already has. Given that semen changes, it is temporal and created. The core of al-Ashʿarī's argument is the distinction between temporary created beings and their creator. According to al-Ashʿarī, as created beings are subject to change, they cannot be eternal. Since created beings are not eternal, they must therefore need a creator, namely, God. The argument states that we would need a creator to explain the transformations of matter.[15] But al-Ashʿarī's arguments go beyond the necessity of a creator. Once he has concluded that creation has a creator, he argues first that this creator must be one (*aḥad*) because if there were two or more creators, a harmonious government over creation would be impossible (several wills would come into conflict).[16] Secondly, following Qurʾān 30:27, he describes God's creative act as the constant restoration of created beings: "And it is He who begins creation; then He repeats it, and that is [even] easier to Him."[17]

The starting point of al-Ashʿarī's argumentation is the behavior of the natural world: if we want to explain the origin and transformations of nature, we should think of an entity that is different from nature. That entity must not be subject to change. This being is God. This kind of argumentation is common within classical theism. But al-Ashʿarī goes beyond the conclusion that nature needs a creator, and holds that natural events depend absolutely on God in every way, thus denying the possibility of any intrinsic causality in nature. According to the Ashʿarite stance, God is the sole agent and is responsible for the existence, change, and accident of every entity and occurrence that takes place in the world.[18]

The idea of nature as incapable of acting by itself and as absolutely dependent on God also appears in al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*

14 See al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb Al-Lumaʿ*, 1.1, §3–4.
15 See ibid., 1.1, § 6.
16 See ibid., 1.3, § 8.
17 See ibid., 1.4, § 9–10.
18 See chapters 3 and 5 of al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb Al-Lumaʿ*.

(*Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*).[19] Concretely, in the seventeenth discussion, al-Ghazālī explains that fire is not the efficient cause of combustion. In fact, fire, like any other natural entity, is in itself incapable of action. Thus, the true cause of combustion cannot be anything other than God, who can make fire burn or not burn. Whether or not al-Ghazālī's last position was the rejection of natural causality is debatable.[20] He was not convinced by the Aristotelian notions of causality because he thought that positing a strong link between cause and effect in the natural realm resulted in a limitation of God's omnipotence. Thus, in the *Incoherence*, he argued that it was impossible to conceive nature as an agent in itself because a true agent is someone who is able to act according to his own will and free choice, and is aware of his own will and the consequences of his own actions.[21] While this way of understanding an agent could include human beings, both al-Ashʿarī and al-Ghazālī hold that God even creates every action for each human being. This doctrine, known as the doctrine of *kasb* or "acquisition," is enormously problematic since it leads to a rather intricate tension between God's will and human actions.[22] Everything suggests that the standard version of this doctrine fails to avoid determinism.

Here, I set aside the discussion of whether the acquisition doctrine fails or not to safeguard human free choice. What is clear is that the doctrine defends God's omnipotence at all costs. For the purposes of this article, we should note that al-Ghazālī conceives God as the sole agent, and even in the case of human beings He creates both the actions and the power to act. This way of understanding God's omnipotence has consequences for the way in which He relates with human beings. There is an important distinction between natural causality

19 Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, parallel English-Arabic text, trans. by Michael E. Marmura, Provo: Brigham Young University Press 2000, pp. 166–167.

20 See Lenn Evan Goodman, "Did Al-Ghazālī Deny Causality?," *Studia Islamica*, vol. 47, 1978, pp. 8–120; Ilai Alon, "Al-Ghazālī on Causality," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* vol. 100, no. 4, 1980, pp. 397–405; Binyamin Abrahamov, "Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality," *Studia Islamica*, vol. 67, 1988, pp. 7–98; Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Al-Ghazālī's Conception of the Agent in the *Tahāfut* and the *Iqtiṣād*: Are People Really Agents?," in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One, Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. by James E. Montgomery, Leuven: Peeters, 2006, pp. 425–440; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009, pp. 147–173; Hans Daiber, "God versus Causality. Ghazālī's Solution and Its Historical Background," in *From the Greeks to the Arabs and Beyond, Volume 2*, pp. 564–86.

21 Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, pp. 55–77.

22 See Binyamin Abrahamov, "A Re-Examination of Al-Ashʿarī's Theory of *Kasb* According to *Kitāb Al-Luma*'," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 2, 1989, pp. 210–221; Jon McGinnis, "Occasionalism, Natural Causation and Science in Al-Ghazālī," in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy. From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. by James E. Montgomery, Leuven: Peeters 2006, pp. 441–463.

and free causality. While nature as understood by most Islamic *mutakallimūn* entirely depends on God,[23] human actions introduce what could be considered a "psychological" aspect: unlike nature, we human beings wonder whether we act freely and are thus responsible of our own acts. In fact, we usually assume that we have power to decide in most of our acts. The *mutakallimūn* strove to harmonize human responsibility and free will with God's omnipotence. They tried not to nullify free will entirely. They were aware of how problematic it was to provide a consistent account of human responsibility and of the problem of evil.[24] In their attempt to articulate a philosophical account of these issues, their main source was the Qurʾān.

The Ashʿarites, al-Ghazālī among them, were convinced that revelation was superior to human reason. Hence, their theoretical approaches were based on the interpretation of the Qurʾānic revelation. And what revelation teaches is that God is creator and governor of the entire world. This is why in the *kalāmic* context the existence of the world functioned as a proof of the existence of God. As al-Ghazālī puts it in another work that he composed around the same time as the *Incoherence*, namely, the *Moderation in Belief* (ca.1091–1095), the existence of the world is known by observation. And given that all existents other than God have a cause, and the world exists, it follows that the world has a cause. But once it is already established that the world has a cause, it is necessary to state what kind of cause this is, whether it is eternal or is something occurring at a particular time.[25] Any reader of al-Ghazālī's treatise already knows that he will argue that the first cause is eternal and is God. But al-Ghazālī does not draw a hasty conclusion. Despite his distrust of philosophy, he adopts philosophical concepts and arguments to prove that the first cause is eternal:

(1) If the cause of the world were something occurring in time, it would need another cause and so on to infinity; given that an infinite regress would be absurd, we must arrive at something "anteriorly eternal," namely, what is

23 An exception to this view would be al-Naẓẓām (d. ca.835–845), who held that God initially creates the world, but then leaves it alone and allows the laws of nature to explain subsequent natural processes and the transformation of matter. See Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of the Religious Thought in Early Islam,* vol. 3, pp. 351–359 and 434–437.

24 See Sajjad Rizvi and Mathieu Terrier, "The Challenge of Evil in Islamic Thought. A Brief Survey," *Oriens*, vol. 49, nos. 3–4, 2021, pp. 173–180.

25 Al-Ghazālī, *Moderation in Belief* (*al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʿtiqād*), trans. by Aladdin M. Yaqub, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2013.

called "the Maker of the world." "Anteriorly eternal" implies that this entity is not preceded by nonexistence.[26]

(2) It is impossible for an entity that has always existed to cease to exist. If this entity could cease to exist, its cessation would require a cause. And al-Ghazālī argues that an entity that has not been preceded by nonexistence or any other prior cause, must have a continuous existence and cannot be affected or annihilated by any other cause or agent.[27]

As we can see, according to al-Ghazālī's argumentation, God has existed from eternity and His existence is different from the existence of created beings. At this point, al-Ghazālī devotes several paragraphs to explaining that God is not an extended substance, is not a body, is not a mode (that is, that whose existence depends on an entity in which it subsists), that He has no location or direction, and no anthropomorphic description (and, therefore, bodily descriptions in the Qur'ān should be interpreted metaphorically). This characterization of God makes Him absolutely distinct from His creation: God is immaterial, eternal, simple, and one. The arguments provided throughout the first part of the *Moderation in Belief* lead to the conclusion that the world has a cause and this cause is identified with God. But how can these logical inferences lead us to know God? Among the divine attributes that al-Ghazālī addresses, there is one that is particularly puzzling: God is "seeable."[28] Certainly, we cannot see God the same way we see material entities. If it were possible for us to see God physically, this would mean that he has a location and that His being is a mode or a substance, and this is precisely what al-Ghazālī has rejected. This is why he explains in which sense it may be said that God is "seeable": seeing God does not necessarily imply the visualization of a physical image of God. For instance, al-Ghazālī explains that we can see one of our friends with our eyes open and, then, we can close our eyes and visualize our friend imaginatively. The visible agrees with the imagined, and in the strict sense there is no a real difference between them, with the exception that the visible image is clearer and more perfect than the imaginative visualization. Thus, al-Ghazālī concludes, the only difference between a visual image and an imaginative visualization is their degree of clarity and disclosure.[29]

With the previous distinction between visual image and imaginative visualization in mind, al-Ghazālī moves on to reflect on whether reason can know things that cannot be visualized, for instance, God's essence and his attributes,

26 See ibid., 1.2, p. 41.
27 See ibid., 1.3, pp. 41–45.
28 Ibid., 1.9, pp. 63–73.
29 Ibid., 1.9, p. 68.

and those things that have no forms, such as power, knowledge, love, vision, and imagination. Even though these kinds of things cannot be visualized, al-Ghazālī argues that they can be known. He argues, however, that in this life our attachment to the body is an obstacle to knowing God, His attributes, and those other things with no forms, so we can only attain an imperfect knowledge of them. Only in the afterlife will we be able to know all these kinds of immaterial realities as they really are. Our knowledge of these things in the afterlife is the equivalent to "seeing." Put in the form of an analogy, just as seeing a visible object is clearer and more perfect than imagining it, so the vision of God in the afterlife will be clearer and more perfect than our knowledge of Him in this life. The difference between seeing God in the afterlife and what we can know through our intellect in this life is only the degree of clarity and perfection. We can understand what a vision of God would be, despite the fact that our reason does not suffice for knowing God.

Al-Ghazālī holds that our knowledge of God cannot rely exclusively on rational arguments or proofs (as he thinks philosophers and extremist Muʿtazilites have done), or on a literal understanding of Qurʾānic revelation. We need both if we really want to know God. The question of the best path to knowing God is crucial in practically all of al-Ghazālī's works. One of the most important writings where he discusses the different methods for reaching that goal is his autobiography, *Deliverance from error* (*al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*), composed around 1106, when he was fifty years old.[30] There, al-Ghazālī discusses the true meaning of knowledge (*ʿilm*) and how we can attain an accurate knowledge of God. He discusses the methodologies and positions of those he calls the "seekers of the truth" (*aṣnāf al-ṭalibīn*), namely, the *mutakallimūn*, the philosophers, those who blindly follow the religious authority, and the Sufis.[31]

Although al-Ghazālī was a *mutakallim* and wrote relevant works on *kalām*, in his autobiography he finds something defective within *kalāmic* methodology. The problem is that *kalāmic* polemics are focused on showing the inconsistencies and misconceptions of those considered innovators or heretics. *Kalām* in practice focuses on refutations and polemical arguments and is not aimed

30 Al-Ghazālī, "Deliverance from Error," in *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of Al-Ghazālī's Al-Munqidh Min Al-Ḍalāl and Other Relevant Works*, trans. by Richard Joseph McCarthy, Boston: Twayne Publishers 1980, pp. 53–123.

31 Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, "Al-Ghazālī on Knowledge (*ʿilm*) and Certainty (*yaqīn*) in *al-Munqidh min aḍ-Ḍalāl* and in *Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*," in *Islam and Rationality. The Impact of al-Ghazālī. Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary, Volume 1*, ed. by Georges Tamer, Leiden: Brill 2015, pp. 229–252; Nurefşan Bulut Uslu, "The Interpretation of Personal Religious Experience in al-Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh min aḍ-Ḍalāl*," *Entelekya*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2020, pp. 129–153.

at critically analyzing the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. For this reason, al-Ghazālī confesses that *kalām* no longer satisfied his search for God.

After discussing the methodology of the *mutakallimūn*, al-Ghazālī deals with philosophy. He recognizes the methodological consistency of philosophy and its capacity to detect errors in other sciences and disciplines. In his careful analysis of the different parts of philosophy, he criticizes physics, metaphysics, ethics, and politics, but he recognizes the superiority of mathematics and logic.[32] While he condemns philosophical statements that he considers erroneous, impious, and even heretical (e.g. the denial of the resurrection of the body, the claim that God does not know particulars, and the affirmation of the eternity of the world), he does not criticize the methodological disciplines *per se*, that is, mathematics and logic. If we read his *kalāmic* and juridical treatises, it is clear that he adopted logical argumentation as a useful method and, in fact, he even wrote short logical treatises.

After dealing with philosophy, al-Ghazālī turns his attention to those who blindly follow the teachings of the religious authority, that is, the infallible imam.[33] The followers of the infallible imam are the Bāṭinites, a pejorative term meaning "esoteric" that al-Ghazālī constantly uses to refer to the Ismaʿilis, a branch of Shia Islam that he describes in an idiosyncratic way. According to al-Ghazālī, they are servile to the authority and replace reason and independent judgment with the instruction (*taʿlīm*) of the authority. Put simply, Bāṭinites replace fallible reason with infallible authority without considering that choosing to trust the authority is a rational decision that may be fallible.

Finally, having criticized those who blindly follow the religious authority, al-Ghazālī careful analyzes Sufism.[34] He finds in the path of the Sufis the most attractive and convincing alternative. He agrees with several Sufi views, e.g. the emphasis on practice instead of theory or ascetic practices. Although he does not entirely agree with the Sufi primacy of ecstasy over worship, al-Ghazālī is convinced that practical spirituality is a better way to know God than theoretical discussions. As his autobiography shows, al-Ghazālī was progressively more inclined towards Sufism, and composed several mystical treatises toward the

32 Al-Ghazālī, "Deliverance from Error," pp. 60–70. For a more detailed discussion on al-Ghazālī's position towards philosophy and *kalām* see Wilfred Madelung, "Al-Ghazālī's Changing Attitude to Philosophy," in *Islam and Rationality. The Impact of al-Ghazālī. Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, vol. 1, ed. by Georges Tamer, Leiden: Brill 2015, pp. 23–34.

33 Al-Ghazālī, "Deliverance from Error," pp. 71–77.

34 Ibid., pp. 77–83.

end of his career.[35] Later on, I shall refer to explanations of the way in which spiritual or mystical approach to God take place according to theoretical or speculative Sufism.

2 God and Creation: Philosophical Arguments

The first philosopher within the Islamic context, al-Kindī, was the head of a group of scholars responsible for the translation of relevant philosophical and scientific texts. Among his adaptations of Greek philosophical works was the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* (an adapted translation of some of Plotinus' *Enneads*), as well as other works from Aristotle and his late ancient commentators. In his best-known work, *On the First Philosophy* (*Fī al-Falsafa al-ūlā*), al-Kindī holds that the subject matter of metaphysics is God, and he conceives God as the unique cause and the creator (*mubdiʿ*) of everything that exists. Once again, God is defined in connection to His creative act. Al-Kindī has in mind several Qurʾānic passages where he suggests that God has created the world out of nothing. For instance, Qurʾān 3:47 declares that when God wants to create matter, he only says, "Be!" and matter is. Another example: in Qurʾān 19:9, God himself says that before God created humanity, we were nothing. With these passages in mind, al-Kindī argues that if the world was created, God is the creator. Al-Kindī is one of the few Islamic philosophers who argued for the creation of the world out of nothing. He understands creation (*ibdāʿ*) as bringing something from non-being into being.[36] Thus, Al-Kindī rejects the Aristotelian view that matter has existed eternally and argues for creation out of nothing.

In a similar vein to John Philoponus (d. 570), the Christian philosopher who in the sixth century tried to refute Proclus' and Aristotle's arguments for the eternity of the world,[37] al-Kindī rejects a numerically infinite series of motions.

35 However, al-Ghazālī's particular way of understanding Sufism deserves analysis and discussion. See Binyamin Abrahamov, "Al-Ghazālī and the Rationalization of Sufism," in *Islam and Rationality. The Impact of al-Ghazālī. Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, vol. 1, pp. 35–48.

36 Al-Kindī, "On the Definitions and Descriptions of Things," in *The Philosophical Works of Al-Kindī*, ed. and trans. by Peter Adamson and Peter E. Pormann, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012, pp. 297–311 [p. 300, §6].

37 See Philoponus, *Against Proclus "On the Eternity of the World 1–5,"* trans. by Michael Share, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2005; Philoponus, *Against Proclus "On the Eternity of the World 6–8,"* trans. by Michael Share, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2005; Philoponus, *Against Proclus "On the Eternity of the World 12–18,"* trans. by James Wilberding, Ithaca:

Given that an actually infinite series cannot be traversed, there must have been an instance in time when the world started to exist.[38] And for al-Kindī, if the world is finite *a parte ante* this also proves that it needs a creator who brought the world into existence, not only out of nothing, but also in a temporal instant.[39] God has the power to create without preexisting matter, and hence He is the first efficient cause. God is radically different from created beings. While created beings are characterized by their materiality and multiplicity, God is the "True One" (*al-wāḥid al-ḥaqq*) and there is no multiplicity in Him. According to al-Kindī, God's "oneness" means that He has no composition, no genus, no specific difference, no motion, and no accidental properties. God is pure unity, pure simplicity and, thus, He is undefinable and ineffable. Human descriptions of God will always be imprecise, even when we think of the divine attributes, since God is absolutely transcendent. Therefore, if something is predicated of Him, al-Kindī holds that this must necessarily be done by way of negation: God has no matter, form, quantity, quality, genus, species, specific difference, relations, properties, or accidents. Thus, by elimination, God is one, simple, and immutable.[40]

Whereas al-Kindī's metaphysics has God as subject matter, thus identifying metaphysics with theology, by contrast al-Fārābī's approach is entirely philosophical. For al-Fārābī, metaphysics is not theology. The subject matter of metaphysics is being (*wujūd*) and unity (*wāḥid*). Thus, metaphysics is primarily ontology, whereas theology, as the study of God as the principle of all beings, is only a part of metaphysics but is not identical with metaphysics.[41] At the beginning of one of his most important works, *On The Perfect State* (*Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*), al-Fārābī deals with what he calls the "first cause." His approach there is entirely philosophical, not only in his way of arguing but also in his use of the vocabulary. He refers to God as "first existent" (*al-mawjūd al-awwal*) precisely because God is the cause of all existing beings. Furthermore, he describes God as eternal, self-sufficient, uncaused, immaterial,

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Cornell University Press 2006; Philoponus, *Against Aristotle, On the Eternity of the World*, trans. by Christian Wildberg, London: Bloomsbury 1987.

38 Al-Kindī, *On First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Works of Al-Kindī*, 2012, pp. 3–57 [pp. 20–25].

39 See Michael Chase, "Creation in Islam from the Qurʾān to al-Fārābī," in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, ed. by Richard C. Taylor and Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, London and New York: Routledge 2016, pp. 248–260.

40 Al-Kindī, *On First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Works of Al-Kindī*, p. 54.

41 See al-Fārābī, "The Aims of Aristotle's Metaphysics," in *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*, trans. by Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 2007, pp. 78–81.

indivisible, and indefinable.[42] Whereas the *mutakallimūn's* description of God is based on Qur'ānic teachings, al-Fārābī uses Neoplatonic and Aristotelian vocabulary. He not only refers to God as the "first existent" or the "first being," but even as "the One." Given God's immaterial nature, al-Fārābī defines God as an intellect in act (*ʿaql bi-l-fiʿl*) whose activity is self-thinking, as is the case with the Aristotelian unmoved mover in *Metaphysics Lambda*. Influenced by Neoplatonic sources such as the *Theology of Aristotle*, al-Fārābī is the first philosopher in the Islamic tradition to hold that the result of God's self-thinking is an emanation (*fayḍ*). And this is how he explains the relation between the first cause, the secondary causes, and the natural world.

According to al-Fārābī's emanative process, through secondary causes the first existent necessarily and indirectly gives existence to every being in the entire universe. In the initial emanation, the second intellects proceed from the self-thinking thought of the first existent. These intellects apprehend themselves and the first existent, thus giving rise to the celestial bodies. The number of second intellects is the same as the number of celestial bodies. There are nine celestial bodies and there is finally a tenth intellect, the active or agent intellect (*ʿaql al-faʿʿāl*), who along with the celestial bodies, governs the processes of generation and corruption that take place in the natural world.[43] As we can see, God or the first existent relates to the natural world by means of several secondary causes. God is ultimately responsible for the emanative process from which natural world derives. Hence, God is the remote efficient cause of the natural world. Although al-Fārābī obviously understands God as the first cause, and he even includes theology or the divine science as part of metaphysics, it is not entirely clear how he integrates ontology with theology or how they are mutually related.

Ibn Sīnā, on the other hand, offers a more consistent integration of the metaphysical and the theological approaches to God, to such an extent that

42 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, parallel English-Arabic text, trans. by Richard Walzer, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1985, pp. 56–101 [mainly 56–81]. See also al-Fārābī, "Political Regime," in *The Political Writings, Volume II*, trans. by Charles E. Butterworth, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2015, pp. 29–94 [mainly pp. 29–30, 39–47].

43 For the detailed explanation of emanations and the role of the agent intellect, see the second chapter of *On the Perfect State*, pp. 88–99, and the first part of al-Fārābī, "Political Regime," pp. 29–60. In these two treatises the celestial bodies are what governs natural processes, and the action of the agent intellect is reserved to assisting human beings in their path to happiness. Yet in another treatise, *On the Intellect* (*Fī al-ʿaql*), the agent intellect is also involved in natural processes. See al-Fārābī, *Letter on the Intellect*, in *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*, trans. by Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 2007, pp. 68–78.

his metaphysics has been considered an onto-theology. Like al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā holds that the proper subject of metaphysics is not God, but being qua being. Still, for Ibn Sīnā, God's existence is something that is investigated in metaphysics. This means that God should be established as the principle of being. In *Metaphysics* 1.5, he presents the metaphysical concepts needed for understanding why deducing the existence of God from the necessity of motion, as the practitioners of natural science do, does not constitute a complete proof. A complete (metaphysical) proof must start not from nature but from the necessity of being. According to Ibn Sīnā, "existent" (*mawjūd*), "thing" (*shay'*), and "necessary" (*wājib* or *ḍarūrī*), are primary metaphysical concepts that can be intuited immediately.[44] "Being" or "existent" (*mawjūd*) is the most general concept, and in fact is common to both created beings and God. Metaphysics is primarily ontology but, given that it includes the study of God as primary cause, it is also theology or divine science.

Shay' and *mawjūd* may be convertible and are broadly predicable of the different kinds of beings. Nevertheless, technically speaking *shay'* is associated with objects that have an essence (*māhiyya*) different from their existence (*wujūd*), while *mawjūd* refers to actual existence. In other words, there are essences that can be thought of without implying their actual existence, e.g., mental beings such as mathematical concepts or fictional entities. *Mawjūd*, by contrast, implies the actualization of the existence of an essence. Ibn Sīnā asserts the ontological primacy of essence over existence.[45] The third concept, *wājib* or *ḍarūrī*, "signifies the assuredness of existence, since existence is known in itself, while non-existence is known through existence."[46] Ibn Sīnā makes a distinction between the necessary being, possible beings, and impossible beings. Impossible beings do not exist because their essence is contradictory, e.g., a square circle. Possible beings are those whose essence is not contradictory but they do not necessarily exist; to exist, possible beings need actualization by an external cause. Finally, the essence of the third kind of being, that is, the Necessary Being, is its existence; it has no cause, but rather exists in itself.[47]

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44 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of "The Healing,"* parallel English-Arabic text, trans. by Michael E. Marmura, Provo: Brigham Young University Press 2005, 1.5, p. 22.

45 Ibid., 8.4, pp. 275–276.

46 Ibid., 1.5, p. 28.

47 Ibid., 1.6, pp. 29–32. Whereas in 1.5 there are some passages in which Ibn Sīnā refers to the identity of essence and existence in God, there are others, e.g. *Metaphysics* 8.5–6, in which he holds that in strict sense God has no essence and, rather, he is pure existence. There is an abundant secondary literature in this regard. For a general approach to the problem see Jules Janssens, "The Metaphysics of God," in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic*

Ibn Sīnā further defends the ontological distinction between possible beings and the necessary being in *Metaphysics* 1.6–7. There, he formulates what could be considered a cosmological argument, that is, the infinite regress argument used also by al-Kindī: the existence of one possible being depends on another, and the chain that explains their existence cannot continue to infinity; thus, there must be an uncaused existent, necessary in itself and external to the contingent universe, namely the Necessary Being. Note that Ibn Sīnā moves from an ontological distinction to a cosmological explanation.

In the same way as al-Fārābī's, Ibn Sīnā's cosmology claims that the world is generated (*muḥdath*) by God through ten emanative mediations.[48] He also locates the active intellect, from which the sublunary world emanates, at the tenth and last stage of the process. Again, as in al-Fārābī's view, God or the Necessary Being is the first efficient cause that produces what Ibn Sīnā calls "possible beings," through mediations or secondary causes.[49] Ibn Sīnā uses the same Arabic term as al-Kindī, *ibdāʿ* (creation), to describe the origin of the world. However, while in al-Kindī's case the term refers to creation out of nothing, for Ibn Sīnā *ibdāʿ* indicates an ontological dependence of the world on God, but not a temporal and *ex nihilo* origin. In other words, there is no creation out of nothing for Ibn Sīnā; rather, God and the world are co-eternal. However, the world, as an aggregate of possible beings, does not exist by itself, but depends entirely on God's action. Thus, God is essentially (though not temporally) prior to the world.[50]

Ibn Sīnā thinks that there was no temporal creation of the world, because God's eternal action has no beginning.[51] The world has always existed. But it cannot be independent from God's action. Creation, for Ibn Sīnā, indicates an eternal process in which possible beings are ontologically dependent upon the Necessary Being, who is responsible for the existence of all possible beings and therefore acts as the first efficient and final cause of the world. Ibn Sīnā's position is complex: it starts with an ontological distinction, then it moves to cosmology; this cosmology only makes sense in light of an ontology that has proved the existence of a Necessary Being. Instead of departing from the explanation of nature as a way to infer the necessity of a first cause of God, Ibn Sīnā

Philosophy, pp. 236–247. And for a more recent interpretation see Damien Janos, *Avicenna on the Ontology of Pure Quiddity*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2020, pp. 539–550.

48 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of "The Healing,"* 9.3–4, pp. 314–334.

49 Ibid., 6.1–2, pp. 194–20.

50 Ibid., 8.3, 272.

51 Ibid., 6.1, 198–199.

starts with an ontology in which the culminating point is the existence of the Necessary Being.

It can be said that Ibn Sīnā formulates an onto-theology in which the study of the Necessary Being leads to the explanation of the world and not the other way around, as another representative Islamic philosopher, namely, Ibn Rushd, does. For Ibn Rushd, the study of motion in nature leads to the study of metaphysics, a discipline that includes the study of God. Unlike al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, for Ibn Rushd the subject matter of metaphysics is not being qua being. Certainly, metaphysics deals with the senses of being and the different kinds of beings. However, its subject matter is not "being" in general, but substance (*jawhar*), the most fundamental category of being.[52] Metaphysics deals, thus, with the investigation of material substances and of immaterial and separate substances. Metaphysics studies God as the eternal substance and ultimate cause of everything. Nevertheless, it belongs to physics to prove God's *existence*. Thus, instead of proceeding from ontology, as Ibn Sīnā does, to attain a philosophical knowledge of God, Ibn Rushd, as does Aristotle in the *Physics*, proceeds from the natural world, from creation. He formulates two arguments for the existence of God, namely, the argument from providence and the argument from design.

According to the argument from providence, everything in the natural world—that is, the sun, the moon, water—is at the service of humanity; according to the argument from design, everything in the natural world has been designed for a specific purpose.[53] Both are teleological arguments and conclude with the necessity of a designer or creator of the world. However, although Ibn Rushd refers to God as the Artisan or Creator, he argues for an eternal creation (*al-ikhtirā*) and not for a temporal creation out of nothing. He sees creation in this case as the continuous actualization of matter, which brings matter from potency to act. Ibn Rushd adopts to some extent the Aristotelian God, that is, the unmoved mover, an immaterial intellect responsible for the eternal motions from which the world proceeds. He postulates the existence of separate intellects moved by their desire for the Prime Mover. Those intellects, in turn, move the celestial spheres (in the case of Ibn Rushd, eight

52 See Averroes, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book Lām*, trans. by Charles Genequand, Leiden: Brill 1996, 1402.6–7, p. 63; and Averroes, *On Aristotle's "Metaphysics": An Annotated Translation of the So-Called "Epitome,"* trans. by Rüdiger Arnzen, Berlin: De Gruyter 2010, pp. 30–32.

53 These two arguments are presented in a compact version in the *Exposition of the Methods of Proof Concerning Religious Doctrines* (*al-Kashf 'an-manāhij al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla*). See Ibrahim Najjar, *Faith and Reason in Islam. Averroes' Exposition of Religious Arguments*, Oxford: Oneworld 2001, pp. 16–44.

concentric spheres), which in turn give rise to the processes of generation and corruption in the natural or sublunary world. According to Ibn Rushd, God is thus the First Cause of motion, and not, as Ibn Sīnā thought, the efficient cause of essences.[54]

Even though each philosopher provides his own arguments regarding the existence and nature of God, they all have in common their attempt to harmonize the Islamic conception of God with Greek philosophical concepts and arguments, especially by means of the notion of First or Primary Cause. Within this and the previous sections, we can see that both the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers were deeply engaged in the task of providing logical arguments as a way to know God. Among the *mutakallimūn*, the Ashʿarites show a more critical and cautious approach to the use of logical arguments. Recall that, for instance, in al-Ghazālī's views, both the Muʿtazilites and the philosophers were imposing their rational methodologies on revelation. In their attempt to understand God, the philosophers were the artificers of a conceptual approach to God that, for some thinkers, for instance Suhrawardī and the Sufis, was limited to artificially describing God, and was very far from a true experience of the divine. It could be said that while the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers were seeking to know the existence and nature of God, the Sufis were seeking a direct cognition of God.

3 The Experience of God beyond Deductive Reasoning and Logical Argumentation

As I mentioned earlier, Sufism took a different path from the discursive reasoning and logical argumentations of the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers. I have shown that some *mutakallimūn*, for instance al-Ghazālī himself, gradually turned to Sufism. The core of Sufi doctrines is the intuitive knowledge of God reached through ascetism and spiritual practices. The term for knowledge in the case of the Sufis is *maʿrifa*, which Henry Corbin translates as "gnosis" in order to emphasize that it is not the deductive reasoning of the Peripatetic philosophers.[55] I shall now discuss the philosophy of illumination, founded by the prominent Iranian thinker Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, and the speculative

54 For Averroes God is, thus, formal and final cause of the natural world. See Averroes, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book Lām*, text 36, 1593–1598, pp. 148–150, and text 44, 1646–1657, pp. 171–176.

55 Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, London: Kegan Paul 1993. While Corbin translates as "gnosis," I prefer "experiential knowledge."

Sufism of the prolific Andalusian thinker, Ibn ʿArabī, who provides a systematic explanation of the mystical experience, while contrasting the *maʿrifa* of Sufism with the deductive reasoning of the philosophers and some *mutakallimūn*.

Suhrawardī developed an eclectic synthesis of Greek, Persian, and even Indian ideas. In addition, he shares common doctrines with traditional Sufism. In fact, he has been considered as someone who neoplatonized Sufi concepts, attempting to provide an explanation of the mystical experience. Unlike traditional Sufi thinkers, Suhrawardī also critically assimilated some elements from Peripatetic philosophy. But this assimilation must be studied carefully. Suhrawardī went beyond Peripatetic philosophy with the aim of developing an "Oriental philosophy" focused on the true knowledge of God. This Oriental philosophy is known as illuminationism (*al-ishrāq*). Suhrawardī's particular way of conceiving philosophy is relevant for our discussion. In a similar vein to Sufism, he holds that philosophy, understood as something strictly deductive and whose goal is not the spiritual experience of God, is incomplete. He therefore criticizes Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical concepts with the aim of showing that they fall short when it comes to truly knowing reality and God.

In his masterpiece, *The Philosophy of Illumination* (*Hikmat al-Ishrāq*), Suhrawardī combines remarkable philosophical rigor with a mystical contemplative spirit.[56] There he presents his criticism that Ibn Sīnā built conceptual and argumentative artifices that do not take a final step towards the true knowledge of God, which consist in a spiritual experience. These criticisms, however, could be considered debatable. I will not deal here with this issue, given that it involves the discussion on whether or not Ibn Sīnā was exclusively a Peripatetic philosopher or was also engaged with the development of philosophical mysticism. It is fair to mention that, besides his Peripatetic works, so influential in the Christian Latin tradition, Ibn Sīnā also wrote mystical treatises in which he shows the same concern of Suhrawardī and the Sufis, that is, cultivating philosophy as something leading to a spiritual experience of the divine.[57]

56 Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, parallel English-Arabic text, trans. by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai, Provo: Brigham Young University Press 1999. And for a complete study on the philosophy of illumination see Mehdi Aminrazavi, *Suhrawardī and the School of Illumination*, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis 2014.

57 See August Ferdinand Michael van Mehren (ed.), *Traités Mystiques d'Avicenne*, Leiden: Brill 1889–1899. Also Georges Vajda, "Les notes d'Avicenne sur la 'Théologie d'Aristote,'" *Revue Thomiste*, vol. 51, 1951, pp. 346–406, and Ibn Sīnā, *Remarks and Admonitions*, 4.2.9 and 4.2.10 (*Kitāb al-Ishārat wa-l-tanbīhāt, vol. 4*, ed. by Sulaymān Dunyā, Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif 1960).

Suhrawardī argues that Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical concepts—existent, thing, necessary—are only mental entities that cannot be considered the starting point for achieving a knowledge of reality or of God.[58] The starting point must be immediately manifest through what Suhrawardī calls "presential knowledge" (*ʿilm hudūrī*), a direct experience of the existing entities.[59] Suhrawardī maintains a sort of phenomenological approach, according to which reality does not need to be defined, but rather should be directly apprehended. Put simply, our experience of reality has more cognitive value than the conceptual entities we create in order to explain it. Just as we know reality by a direct apprehension, we also directly apprehend ourselves. This means that while we are aware of external reality, we are also aware of ourselves. Self-awareness for Suhrawardī implies that we have an immediate knowledge of our own soul and essence.[60] In other words, we are always aware of ourselves, and we are aware that we are the ones who are having sense-perceptual experiences of external reality, and that each of us is who he is.

Yet for Suhrawardī the knowledge of the external world is not something empirical. He does not hold that our knowledge consists of grasping sense-perceptive properties. He thinks that we have an immediate access to the being of the different external entities, which manifests itself in the form of light.[61] This notion of "light" is difficult to understand, since it has mystical connotations. Light, for Suhrawardī, is what is immediately manifest (*zāhir*). We can recognize the hierarchy of beings according to their luminosity, from the pure light of immaterial beings to the accidental light in physical bodies.[62] God is the Light of Lights, from which the rest of (less luminous) entities emanate. The ontological status of each being depends on its luminosity, which in turn depends on the proximity of each kind of being to the Light of Lights. His emanative model, which retains an ontological structure similar to the one proposed by Ibn Sīnā, starts with the luminosity of the separate intellects. After these intellects, follow the physical bodies, which are not lights in themselves, but they depend upon the effect of light. And the hierarchy ends with dark accidents, that is, qualities of physical entities that are manifest as long as they inhere in physical bodies.

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58 See Sajjad Rizvi, "Roots of an Aporia in Later Islamic Philosophy: The Existence-Essence Distinction in the Metaphysics of Avicenna and Suhrawardīi," *Studia Iranica*, vol. 29, 2000, pp. 61–108.

59 Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, § 161, p. 105.

60 Ibid., § 115–120, pp. 80–83. See Jari Kaukua, "Self-awareness in Avicenna, Suhrawardī and Mullā Sadrā," *Sophia Perennis*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2011, pp. 5–30.

61 Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, §107, p. 76; § 117, p. 81.

62 Ibid., §109, p. 77.

Suhrawardī's terminology for referring to God is Qur'ānic. For instance, Qur'ān 24:35 describes God as "the Light of the heavens and the earth." Before Suhrawardī, other Islamic thinkers used these kinds of references. A well-known example is al-Ghazālī, whose Sufi treatise *The Niche of Lights* (*Mishkāt al-anwār*) uses the same terminology and was one of many sources and influences on Suhrawardī's philosophy of illumination.[63] Given that God is considered the Light of Lights from whom the lower levels of light emanate, Suhrawardī feels obliged to provide proofs for the existence of God. His proofs are actually based on Peripatetic arguments. Like Ibn Sīnā, he argues that contingent beings cannot exist without a higher and nobler cause;[64] given that an infinite chain of causes is impossible, there must be a being that is necessary by essence.[65] But in Suhrawardī's view, these proofs are only the first step for taking the true path toward knowing God. In other words, Peripatetic philosophy—that is, discursive reasoning and logical demonstration—is a prerequisite for mastering the philosophy of illumination. Reason is not sufficient for knowing God. In fact, as he explains in the introduction of *The Philosophy of Illumination*, reason needs intuition if we really want to attain true knowledge.[66] The Arabic term for "intuition" in Suhrawardī's treatise is *dhawq*, a term that literally means "taste," but in the Sufi context it implies a direct, intimate mystical or spiritual contemplation. Both Suhrawardī and the Sufis use the same term to describe similar experiences: the intuitive access to realities beyond our rational faculty.[67]

According to Sufism, *dhawq* is the best way of knowing God and yet, it is obviously not easy to explain this kind of knowledge. An extreme simplification would be to understand *dhawq* as perceiving reality, not as it appears to rational knowledge, but as the manifestation of God. This is why our deductive reasoning and logical argumentations, which superficially describe empirical reality, are far from revealing or unveiling what existing beings really are. According to Suhrawardī, all existing beings radiate light, and this light manifests the Light of Lights. When someone has reached this level of understanding reality, that is, the perception of the luminosity within every existing being,

63 See al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, parallel English-Arabic text, trans. by David Buchman, Provo: Brigham Young University Press 1998.

64 Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, § 164–173, p. 77.

65 Ibid., § 129–134, p. 77.

66 Ibid., § 1–6, pp. 1–4.

67 In fact, the same vocabulary can be found in al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā. See Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and its Avicennian Foundation*, London and New York: Routledge 2012, pp. 48–55.

he is having a direct intuition of the Light of Lights. And this is very similar to what Sufis mean by *maʿrifa* or intuitive knowledge of God.

As can be seen, there are similar views in Suhrawardī's philosophy of illumination and Sufism. However, there are relevant differences between the philosophy of illumination and some Sufi thinkers. As I mentioned earlier, while Suhrawardī criticizes *falsafa*, especially Ibn Sīnā, he keeps some elements of Peripatetic philosophy. In fact, he treats *falsafa* as a preamble to intuitive knowledge. By contrast, most Sufis never entirely agreed with Peripatetic philosophy. At the risk of providing excessive generalization, I would say that Sufism does not aspire to offer a bookish and erudite knowledge based on the study of philosophical and scientific arguments, but an experiential knowledge whose aim is to unify ourselves with God.

According to Sufism, the experience of God takes place when it is possible to perceive in the multiplicity of created and contingent beings the manifestation of the divine oneness (*tawhīd*). Sufis would agree with Suhrawardī in considering contingent beings as expressions of the light of God. Thus, a particular appreciation of creation (*khalq*) leads to the experience of the divine. Instead of describing and categorizing reality according to its external appearance, Sufi knowledge (*maʿrifa*) is about perceiving and intuiting the absolute unity of being in all of reality, in order to realize that nothing exists outside the only being, namely, God, and that everything exists thanks to Him. Reality is in this sense a continuous succession of signs of God's love. And intuiting the presence of God implies for Sufism immersing oneself in the reality of this world through a harmonious, peaceful, supportive, and loving relationship with creatures.

Despite the distance between Peripatetic philosophy and Sufism, theoretical Sufism redefined philosophical vocabulary to describe spiritual experiences. In this sense, philosophy provides concepts and terminology that are helpful for systematically expressing the experience of the divine. The most illustrative example of this use of philosophical terminology is Ibn ʿArabī.[68] He himself says in his extensive oeuvre *The Meccan Openings*, that he composed those chapters through divine inspiration and not deliberately.[69] It would be ambitious and even naïve to attempt to provide a systematic explanation of

68 His works on the mystical experience inspired what is known as the "school of Ibn ʿArabī." See, for instance, William Chittick, "'The Central Point': Qūnawī's Role in the School of Ibn ʿArabī," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabī Society*, vol. 35, 2004, pp. 25–45; Mukhtar H. Ali, *Philosophical Sufism. An Introduction to the School of Ibn al-ʿArabī*, London and New York: Routledge 2022.

69 See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt*, I.59.

Ibn ʿArabī's doctrines in such a brief space. Thus, I only wish to draw attention to the way he uses the term *wujūd*, a philosophical concept found in Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics.[70] As I explained in the previous section, *wujūd* is translated in philosophical jargon as "being" or "existent." The root of this Arabic term denotes "existing," but it also denotes "finding" or "appearing." The latter is the connotation it has within the Qurʾān, and Ibn ʿArabī frequently uses the term to express the encounter or experience of what exists.[71] Hence, the encounter with existing entities is an encounter with the real and true being, God.

When Ibn ʿArabī states that the encounter with created entities is the encounter with God, we should not understand this to mean that things are essentially identical to God. Ibn ʿArabī is not a pantheist or a monist. What he is claiming is that things exist through God. In this sense, entities are not substantially identical to God, but they are also not ontologically independent from Him. In fact, created things are non-existent in themselves and should only be considered as existent insofar as they depend on God. In this regard, created things have relative existence (*wujūd al-aṣlī al-iḍāfī*) and relative non-existence (*al-ʿadam al-iḍāfī*).[72] God is the only Being, and created beings are a manifestation of the radiance of the unique Being. Ibn ʿArabī emphasizes God's oneness (*tawḥīd*), that is, the statement that there is no other Being but God.[73] If the only real Being is God, created things have "being" only in a derivative sense.

The distinction between God and created beings at an ontological level is once again reminiscent of Ibn Sīnā's onto-theology. In fact, Ibn ʿArabī often uses the same terms as Ibn Sīnā, that is, the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*)

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70 In the previous section, I translated *mawjūd* as "existent" or "being" when explaining Ibn Sīnā, and *wujūd* as "existence." Both of these notions are crucial and problematic in Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics. I will not deal with this issue here. However, one of the most helpful studies that include an analysis of the same terminology, even among *mutakallimūn* and Sufis, is Olga Lizzini, "Wuǧūd-Mawǧūd/Existence-Existent in Avicenna. A Key Ontological Notion of Arabic philosophy," *Quaestio*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2003, pp. 111–138.

71 See William Chittick, *The Sufi Path to Knowledge. Ibn al-ʿArabī Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1989, pp. 77–94.

72 See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt*, II.587.32.

73 The emphasis on God's uniqueness and oneness led to misinterpretations of Ibn ʿArabī. As Chittick explains, he has been considered as the founder of a well-known Sufi doctrine known as the "unity of being" or "unity of existence" (*wahdat al-wujūd*). However, Ibn ʿArabī never uses this expression. It seems that it was Ibn Taymiyya, a traditionalist thinker that I will mention later, who first attributed this doctrine to Ibn ʿArabī. See William Chittick, *The Sufi Path to Knowledge*, pp. 289–290. Also, William Chittick, "Ibn ʿArabī," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2020 edition: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/ibn-arabi/>.

and contingent beings (*mumkināt*).[74] Now, despite God's transcendence and His "ontological exclusivity," He is still related to his creation (*khalq*). This relationship is manifest insofar as in created entities God has given preponderance (*tarjīḥ*) to existence over non-existence and has made each entity a receptacle (*qābil*) for Being. In Ibn ʿArabī's own words: "The being [or existence] (*wujūd*) attributed to each created thing is the Being of the Real, since possible things are non-existence. However, the entities of possible beings are receptacles for the manifestation of this Being."[75]

Note how this passage explicitly states that created things have no existence in themselves but only insofar as they are related to God. Created things are the loci in which being becomes manifest. In this sense, God is ontologically present in every created thing, and this is why it is possible to find God, the Being, in them. The relation between God and created things must be understood dialectically. Otherwise, it could seem contradictory to hold that God is transcendent and at the same time is present in created things. The Arabic terms Ibn ʿArabī uses are *tanzīh* (incomparability or transcendence) and *tashbīh* (similarity or comparison); in the context of our discussion, the latter means an assimilation of God to created beings. The *mutakallimūn* and the Peripatetic philosophers argued for God's *tanzīh* or transcendence. In the previous section, I mentioned the secondary causes or mediations through which God acts in the world, according to the philosophers, and how some of them conclude that God is the remote efficient cause of created beings. By contrast, note that *tashbīh* implies the proximity of God to created beings, to the point of assuming that creation is not radically distinct from God; rather, creation is the manifestation of God, and He is somehow present in created beings.

While the *mutakallimūn* condemned *tashbīh*, Ibn ʿArabī embraced both *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*.[76] And this is why we must think dialectically if we want to follow Ibn ʿArabī's exposition: while God is transcendent, inaccessible, far away from created beings, at the same time He is present as long as His creation is the receptacle of His being and in a sense His image. In other words, the *wujūd* of all created things is not the same as God's Being, but reflects the nondelimited Being of God. Insofar as the world reflects God's being, it is a theophany and a self-disclosure (*al-jalāʾ wa al-istijlāʾ*) of God, a visible manifestation

74 See, for example, Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt*, I.271.20 or II.248.24, just to mention two examples among many within such an extensive work as the *al-Futūhāt*.

75 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt*, II.69.3.

76 Ibid., III.132.9: "…he who comes to know Him through the divine knowledge-giving has combined incomparability (*tanzīh*) and similarity (*tashbīh*)." Translation by William Chittick, *The Sufi Path to Knowledge*, p. 76.

of Him.[77] However, this divine manifestation is veiled; it is not evident to our ordinary perception. To realize this divine presence, it is necessary to unveil created things by means of imagination (*khayāl*). But in Ibn ʿArabī, imagination does not mean the faculty through which we fantasize. Rather, imagination is a faculty that makes the invisible visible.[78] Through comparisons and analogies, imagination provides access to the imaginal world (*ʿālam al-mithāl*).[79] By "imaginal world," Ibn ʿArabī means a luminous and immaterial boundary and bridge between the physical world and the spiritual world, between the visible and the invisible; it resembles the physical world in its being sensible (even though it is not perceived through the senses but through imagination), and it is similar to the spiritual world in its being luminous.

Put simply, Ibn ʿArabī teaches that Sufis see in created things the manifestation of God, unveiling what is given to the senses and discovering the radiance of God's light (*nūr*). Following Qurʾān 24:35, a passage quoted earlier, Ibn ʿArabī identifies God with light and light with being. The *ʿarifūn* (that is, those who have attained *maʿrifa* or the knowledge of God) are those who have understood that while God is transcendent (*tanzīh*), created beings reflect and manifest God's mercy, compassion, and love. This level of knowledge can only be attained through a careful assimilation of the spiritual teachings of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. This assimilation of Qurʾānic teachings leads not only to an understanding of those passages that emphasize the transcendence, majesty, and inaccessibility of God, but also of those in which the Qurʾān points to the proximity of God to His creation. While the Qurʾān of course characterizes God as radically transcendent, leading several *mutakallimūn* and philosophers to

77 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt*, 11.304.33: "The Prophet said in a hadith which unveiling has shown to be sound, 'When God discloses Himself to a thing, it humbles itself to Him.' God discloses himself perpetually, since changes are witnessed perpetually in the manifest things and in the nonmanifest things, the unseen and the visible, the sensory and the intelligible. His task is self-disclosure, and the task of the existent things is change and passage from one state to another state. Among us there are those who recognize this and those who do not recognize it. Those who recognize it worship Him in every state. Those who do not recognize it deny Him in every state." Translation by William Chittick, *The Sufi Path to Knowledge*, p. 103.

78 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt*, 11.379.3: "The Prophet said: 'I saw my Lord in the form of a youth.' This is like the meanings that a sleeper sees in his dreams within sensory forms. The reason for this is that the reality of imagination is to embody that which is not properly body; it does this because its presence gives this to it." Translation by William Chittick, *The Sufi Path to Knowledge*, p. 116.

79 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt*, 11.379.3: "None of the strata of the cosmos makes known the situation as it really is[,] except this imaginal presence, for it makes contraries come together, and within it the realities become manifest as they are in themselves." Translation by William Chittick, *The Sufi Path to Knowledge*, p. 116.

conclude that God can only be known through negation, it also contains passages like 50:16 in which it says that God "is closer to the human being than the jugular vein," and passages like 2:115, where we read that, "whichever way you turn, there is the face of God."

At the risk of oversimplifying Ibn ʿArabī's vast work, full of nuances and difficult-to-interpret passages, we can say that he is looking for the perfect balance between understanding God as transcendent and present in this world. Ibn ʿArabī has a strong preference for unveiling the presence of God in this world over approaching God exclusively from the angle of deductive reasoning. Nevertheless, even though the experience of unveiling allows us to perceive the presence of God through created things, it does not replace the vision of God in the afterlife.

4 Concluding Remarks: Deductive Reasoning versus the Experience of the Divine

In the introduction, I raised the question of the kind of knowledge or experience of God to which the arguments and descriptions of Islamic intellectuals lead. In the subsequent sections, I have discussed different arguments and descriptions that have something in common: they reflect human attempts to know God. From the opening paragraphs, I pointed out basic differences between the *kalāmic*, philosophical, and mystical approaches to the knowledge of God. I pointed out that the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers resorted to deductive reasoning and logical argumentations for proving the existence of God, and to define His nature and His relation to created beings. As I have shown, while Ashʿarite *mutakallimūn* employed deductive reasoning, they also delineated the limits of this method. Methodologically speaking, there are of course differences between the way in which the *mutakallimūn* and philosophers employed logical arguments: for the former, logical arguments helped to strengthen the coherence of revelation; for the latter, logic was an accurate method leading to a truth that is in harmony with particular interpretations of revelation.

In other words, for the *mutakallimūn* the knowledge of God comes from revelation. Thus, Qurʾānic exegesis becomes particularly important for unraveling the sense of God's word. The attempts to establish the correct interpretation of the Qurʾān led to intense polemics and debates among the *kalāmic* schools. I mentioned that al-Ghazālī himself recognized that those debates ended up moving away from the truth by exclusively focusing on the refutation of adversaries. The centrality of deductive reasoning in the Qurʾānic exegesis by

the *mutakallimūn*—Muʿtazilites and Ashʿarites—gave rise to a philosophical theology. In the Post-classical period of Islamic intellectual history, there were important traditional religious thinkers, for instance, Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328), who distrusted and criticized *kalām*.[80] Anti-*kalāmic* thinkers found that the logical reasonings of both the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers ended up deviating from the original sense of Qurʾānic propositions.

From the second section it became clear that philosophers in Islamic lands not only adopted Greek logic as a proper method for understanding God and His creation; they also assimilated and transformed Greek cosmological models and metaphysical concepts. In its emergent stage, philosophy received some influence from Muʿtazilism. Yet later on, with the consolidation of philosophy in Islamic lands, several philosophical concepts and arguments were adopted by the *mutakallimūn*. In the case of the mystical thinkers, some concepts were redefined, as shown in the third section. Several philosophical works, mainly by Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, had in turn a strong impact in the Latin Christian Middle Ages. The influence of these philosophers is still perceptible within modern European philosophy[81] and, in fact, it is necessary to explore in greater detail its direct and indirect assimilation in thinkers such as Spinoza, for example.

As I mentioned, both the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers were the target of traditionalist criticism. Again, Ibn Taymiyya and his followers attacked Greek logic.[82] Despite their hostile attitude towards philosophy, it is necessary to clarify that traditionalist religious thinkers were not against reason.[83] Rather, they were against imposing arbitrary deductions and conceptual artifices on the interpretation of religious propositions. In this regard, their criticism was to some extent similar to the criticism offered by mystical thinkers. As I showed in the third section, mystical thinkers claimed that neither deductive reasoning nor logical demonstrations were enough to reach a true knowledge

80 See Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, Leiden: Brill 2007, pp. 19–69.

81 See for example Hans Daiber, "The Reception of Islamic Philosophy at Oxford in the 17th Century. The Pococks' (Father and Son) Contribution to the Understanding of Islamic Philosophy in Europe," in *From the Greeks to the Arabs and Beyond. Volume 2*, pp. 687–704.

82 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Against the Greek Logicians*, trans. by Wael B. Hallaq, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993. And see Farid Sulaiman, "Ibn Taymiyya Kritik an der griechischen Philosophy," in *Islamische Philosophie: Band 4: Die Kritik and der Falsafa*, ed. by Muhammad Sameer Murtaza, Hamburg: Tredition 2020, pp. 209–236

83 A good example of the way in which ibn Taymiyya, for instance, understood the role of reason in revelation is Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation: A Study of* Darʾ tâāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql, Leiden: Brill 2020.

of God. Mystical thinkers advocated the direct experience of God. However, we have seen that they provided systematic explanations of this experience. Their approach to the knowledge of God did not actually escape unscathed from the criticism of traditionalist thinkers. Suhrawardī was accused of heresy by the political authorities of Aleppo, where he was executed. While someone like Ibn Taymiyya had admiration for Ibn ʿArabī's spiritual teachings, he considered his notion of *wujūd* unacceptable. Ibn Taymiyya wrongly believed that for Ibn ʿArabī there was no distinction between God and created things.[84] I have dealt with this matter in the third section, explaining the relation between God and created things in more precise terms.

"Philosophical Sufism," as conceived by Suhrawardī and ibn ʿArabī, was enormously influential on Mullā Ṣadrā (d.1640), the most relevant philosopher after Ibn Sīnā and the most representative thinker in the Post-classical period. Mullā Ṣadrā was thoroughly versed not only in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* but also in Sunni and Shiʿite *kalām*, philosophy—especially Ibn Sīnā and Ṭūsī[85] (d. 1274)—and in Suhrawardī's philosophy of illumination and ʿIbn Arabī's Sufi doctrines. Mullā Ṣadrā tried to overcome the dichotomy between deductive reasoning and the experience of the divine.

The density of Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophical doctrines require a highly detailed treatment; I will not attempt that here. Suffice it to say that Mullā Ṣadrā conceived of philosophy as the rational inquiry into reality and, like most philosophers, he developed a metaphysics and an epistemology.[86] However, for Mullā Ṣadrā, philosophy is not only a rational method but a way of life and, as such, it involves asceticism and spiritual exercises that lead to self-knowledge and to the correct path to the divine.

It is clear enough that there is a distinction between approaching God by means of human deductive reasoning and seeking a mystical, intuitive, and direct experience of the divine. These two approaches are usually thought to be in opposition to each other. But this is not necessarily true. As I have shown,

84 See Reza Jalili and Rahman Bolhasani, "Ibn Taymiyya's View on Mystical Ontology: A Critical Analysis," *Sophia Perennis*, vol. 17, no. 38, 2021, pp. 63–92.

85 For a general approach to this philosopher see Sayeh Meisami, *Nasir Al-Din Tusi: A Philosopher for All Seasons*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society 2019.

86 See Sajjad H. Rizvi, *Mulla Sadra Shirazi: His Life, Works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007. Bilingual editions in Arabic-English of Mullā Ṣadrā's significative works have been published: *The Elixir of the Gnostics*, trans. by William Chittick, Provo: Brigham Young University Press 2003; *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, trans. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. by Ibrahim Kalin, Provo: Brigham Young University Press 2014. More treatises are available in French, German and other languages.

as an exponent of the mystical approach Suhrawardī considers deductive reasoning to be the preamble to mystical-intuitive knowledge. Ibn ʿArabī employs philosophical terminology to explain as much as possible the mystical-intuitive experience of God. Both thinkers challenge the deductive reasoning employed in philosophy and *kalām* or philosophical theology. A commonplace within the philosophy of religion is to make a distinction between the God of the philosophers and the God of faith. But beyond this trite distinction, Islamic approaches to the knowledge of God raise a methodological question regarding the scope of our rational constructs for knowing God. And there is, in my view, a convincing response that can be found in those thinkers—al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, Ibn ʿArabī—who realized that deductive reasoning, logical argumentations, and philosophical concepts shed light on the knowledge of God, but the correct path to God transcends our rational understanding and moves towards an experiential dimension.[87]

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PART 3

Philosophical Anthropology

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CHAPTER 8

The Logical Foundations of Divinity in Ernst Cassirer: Descartes, Leibniz and Cohen

Gustavo Esparza

Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to study the logical foundations of the concept of divinity in Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of religion. I go back to the philosophy of René Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, and Hermann Cohen and their logical foundations, as well as the idea of God that each proposed. I will argue that Cassirer's reading of each and how he interpreted and reconsidered the idea of God, influenced deeply his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, especially its second volume, *Mythical Thought*. Here it is emphasized that for Cassirer, the Cartesian idea of God provides the "Foundations" of Being, while in Leibniz's philosophy Cassirer structures the "universality" of knowledge and, finally, in the idea of God proposed by Cohen he finds the "logical" and "ethical" base of religious meaning and practice. Finally, I explain that in Cassirer's philosophy of religion, God appears as a λόγος in the Greek sense of the term.

1 Religion as an Epistemological Form

The purpose of this paper is to study the logical foundations of the concept of divinity in Ernst Cassirer's philosophy, as well as the influence, which is not so explicitly clear, of the works of Descartes, Leibniz, and Cohen for the development of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, especially, especially the second part, *Mythical Thought*.[1] There, Cassirer presents religious thought as a

1 Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. I: Language,* trans. by Ralph Manheim, New Haven: Yale University Press 1955*; Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, II: Mythical Thought,* trans. by Ralph Manheim, New Haven: Yale University Press 1955*; Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, III: Phenomenology of Knowledge*, trans. by Ralph Manheim, New Haven: Yale University Press 1957; *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, IV: The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*, ed. and trans. by John Michael Krois and Donald Phillip, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1998. Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen: I: Die Sprache; II: Das mythische Denken; III: Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 2010; Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen: IV: Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen*,

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"symbolic form" derived from a dialectical process the basis of which is the mythical intuition of the world, and which then progresses through ritualization (active and linguistic), to end in the conformation of a universal religious form of understanding of the singular. On the religious form he explains:

> For the religious significance [*religiöse Bedeutsamkeit*] of an event depends no longer on its content but solely on its form [*Form*]: what gives it its character as a symbol [*Symbol*] is not what it is and where it immediately comes from but the spiritual aspect in which it is seen, the relation to the universe [*Beziehung auf die Universe*] which it obtains in religious feeling and thought. The movement of the religious spirit [*Bewegung des religiösen Geistes*] which constitutes its form [*Form*], not as a static figure [*Gestalt*] but as a characteristic mode of configuration [*Gestaltung*], consists in a living oscillation between those two fundamental views [*Grundauffassungen*]. Here we find that correlation of meaning and image [*Sinn und Bild*] and also that conflict between them which are both deeply rooted in the essence of symbolic expression [*des sinnbildlichen Ausdrucks*].[2]

As can be seen, for Cassirer religious thought is (1) a form [*Form*] through which the constitution of meaning [*Gestaltung konstituiert*] is enabled, (2) a symbolic expression [*sinnbildlicher Ausdruck*] in spiritual progress [*Bewegung des religiösen Geistes*] and, finally, (3) a form of relation between meaning and image [*Sinn und Bild*]. In this way, then, religious thought is to be understood as a symbolic form independent of all other possible expressions (language, science, art, etc.), but which, at the same time, shapes the world of culture. In this context, the religious form is seen as a cultural expression that enables a means of universal understanding of the singular phenomena that the subject him- or herself experiences, and philosophy is seen as a particular way of conceiving the world.

If one examines the influence of Descartes, Leibniz and Cohen in Cassirer's work, this symbolic form might be considered as a logical way of experiencing the world. However, the contrast is that in the analysis of each of these three thinkers, although there are arguments to sustain an understanding and

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ed. by John Michael Krois and Oswald Schwemmer, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1995;. Here and henceforth: *PSF*. I will use and include the reference to the English translation, stating the volume and page number, followed by the reference to the German edition, using the abbreviation *PdSF*.

2 *PSF*, II, p. 260 / *PdSF*, II, p. 304.

experience of the divine as a universal principle (logical and metaphysical), from which the foundation and understanding of the world is possible, nonetheless in all of them the emphasis is on the metaphysical link between the experience of the human being and a superior being as the foundation of all that exists. To underline the nuance to which I want to point, Cassirer's reinterpretation consists in highlighting the relation between the individual and the universal as an eminently logical relation,[3] the central function of which is the subordination of ethical-religious propositions to epistemological propositions. This would imply, as in the case of Socrates, that the foundation of value—and hence practical life—depends on the knowledge of the divine (of the λόγος).[4]

In contrast, for Cassirer, this logic of the religious—founded on the basis of Descartes, Leibniz, and Cohen—develops in a phenomenological manner by going through three stages: it begins with the mythical experience of the world, continues with the linguistic, pictorial or any form of representation that allows emotional stabilization, and ends in the signification of the divine essence as a universal unity. With respect to the first stage, also called expressive, in *Das mythische Denken*, it is argued that the first form of understanding of the existent is linked to and conditioned by a form of universal existence: "Long before the world appeared to consciousness [*Bewusstsein*] as a totality of empirical things and a complex of empirical attributes it was manifested as an aggregate of mythical powers and effects [*mythischer Kräfte und Wirkungen gegeben*]."[5] This establishes an archaic way of classifying the experiences of the world, which leads to the logical foundation of the expressions. Precisely because reality is not offered as a homogeneous totality, but by means of an emotive differentiation (of attraction or repulsion), in a second stage the perception of expressions would be ordered according to an archaic or mythical logic: "it is not paradoxical to speak of...categories of mythical consciousness, mythical thought...is grounded in a law of its own kind and imprint

3 For a study of the Universal and Singular relation through the function, see Ernst Cassirer, "Kant und die moderne Mathematik. Mit Bezug auf Bertrand Russells und Louis Couturats Werke über die Prinzipien der Mathematik," *Kantstudien*, vol. 12, 1907, pp. 1–49.

4 In a previous study, I have examined the figure of Socrates in Cassirer's philosophy, and how this ideal of knowledge is developed in the exile years (1933–1945) and applied to develop an ethics of culture. See Gustavo Esparza, "Las raíces pedagógicas de la *Apología de Sócrates*. Influencias platónicas en la filosofía del exilio de E. Cassirer (1933–1945)," in *La recepción platónica en el siglo xx. Una* Poíesis *de la percepción*, ed. by Claudio Calabrese and Ethel Junco, New York: Peter Lang, 2020, pp. 51–74.

5 *PSF*, II, p. 1 / *PdSF*, II, p. 1. For more on the general foundations of these ideas, see Cassirer, *PSF*, II, pp. 75–79 / *PdSF*, II, p. 90–94.

[*Prägnung*]."[6] This ordering constitutes a way of structuring the human world by recognizing the existence of a certain *basis phenomena* that permeate and order the way of conceiving the *being*:

> The highest gift we have received from God and nature is life, the rotating movement of the monad about itself, knowing neither pause nor rest. The impulse to nurture this life is ineradicable implanted in each individual, although its specific nature remains a mystery to ourselves and others.[7]

Thus, the understanding and experience of the religious is constituted as an expressive unity of the "I," the "you" and the "it," but where the "identity of the unity" is not understood under a substantial but rather a symbolic character. This would mean that our religious understanding of the singular is linked to a dialectically constructed idea of divinity, but at the same time, subject to a universal model that enables us to understand the particular forms of existence from a unique and free point of view.

This dialectic between form and freedom constitutes a harmonious interaction of opposites that conditions the experience of religious life in a unique way, but also offers the possibility for the subject to order his or her own experiences from a unique form. However, as previously mentioned, this idea, so characteristic of Cassirer's thought, is sustained by a "critical inquiry of knowledge" [*Erkenntniskritik*] of the Cartesian, Leibnizian and Cohenian work. Nevertheless, and in spite of the achievements attained, in this historical philosophical tracing it can be appreciated that although they proposed that religion is an authentic foundation of universal understanding of everything that exists, both logically and metaphysically, it is important to emphasize that the study of the religious in Cassirer highlights primarily the expressive, functional, and normative character of the religious form.

This reading by Cassirer offers two ways of interpretation: first, this apparent bias or selectivity on his part can be considered as an attempt to justify religious thought as a way of objectifying the religious, seeking for this purpose a hermeneutic adjustment of the sources in order to underline an insufficiency of the metaphysics of religious form, which would imply, therefore, assuming

6 Ernst Cassirer, "The Form of the Concept of Mythical Thinking," in *The Warburg Years* (*1919–1933*). *Essays on Language, Art, Myth and Technology*, trans. by S. G. Lofts and A. Calcagno, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2013, p. 10. See also *PSF*, II, pp. 27–70 / *PdSF,* II, pp. 35–86.

7 *PSF*, IV, p. 127 / *PdSF*, IV, p. 123. See also *PSF*, II, pp. 155–174 / *PdSF*, II, pp. 181–204.

the idea of 'divinity' only as a 'universal logical principle.'[8] The second way, the one I am interested in defending, is very close, but its nuances would allow us to validate Cassirer's reading of these authors in order to ground "expression" as a logical form of religion, allowing us to conceive of religious norms as a principle of action that becomes an ethics of culture. Ultimately, this reading that I will propose, points to the author's aim being the development of an alternative route to that of Descartes, Leibniz and Cohen, but the purpose of which is to establish divinity as a logical unity of natural and spiritual life, as it was defined in *Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen*: "The cosmos of 'reason,' its divisions and specificity, its universal character and systematic structure, is revealed to us in this Trinity of theoretical, practical and aesthetical meaning....The pure form of the theoretical, ethical and aesthetic cannot itself be divided."[9]

This alternative path that I will suggest involves a reconstruction of the postulates of each of the authors, while offering the key interpretations introduced by Cassirer, as well as the way in which these were incorporated into his philosophy of mythical thought. The present paper therefore proposes to reconstruct the Cassirerian interpretation of the thought of René Descartes and Leibniz,[10] as well as the comparison of his thought with that of his teacher Hermann Cohen,[11] in order to visualize the symbolic expressive character of religious thought as a logical and normative form of universal understanding, rather than as a universal metaphysical principle which all existing forms take as a reference model to apply to particular situations.[12]

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8 This a complex problem that would merit a chapter on its own, but that cannot be examined properly in this paper. For a discussion of the topic, see Hans–Georg Gadamer, "The Marburg Theology" in *Heidegger's Way*, trans. by John W. Stanley, Albany: State University of New York Press 1994, pp. 29–44.

9 *PSF*, IV, pp. 3–4 / *PdSF*, IV, pp. 3–4.

10 See in particular Ernst Cassirer, *Leibniz' System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen*, Marburg: N.G. Elwert 1902. The introduction to this volume is his doctoral dissertation: *Descartes' Kritik der matematischen und Naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis*, pp. 3–104.

11 See Hermann Cohen, *Writings on Neo-Kantianism and Jewish Philosophy*, ed. by Samuel Moyn and Robert S. Schine, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press 2021.

12 The general problem of metaphysics, according to Cassirer, is that there are no logical foundations on which two substances could be linked together to establish an essential form of unity. One form that has been historically proposed, according to Cassirer, is the attempt to unite the manifold through the selection of what is essential or considered important by the subject, but without implying that the psychological selection of the manifold is "essential," so that there is no criterion justifying such selection of features by the agent. See Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function and Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, trans. by William Curtis Swabey and Marie Collins Swabey, New York: Dover Publications 1953, pp. 3–33.

Before moving on to the next section, it is necessary to note that the concept of "logic" will gradually become clearer as the religious influences are presented, but for now it can be said that Cassirer understands by logic the function of the relation between a particular element with a universal principle, as well as the modes (historical, scientific, psychological and cultural) through which this link is justified. In this paper we will discuss only those modes and links that Cassirer gathers from the work of Descartes, Leibniz, and Cohen to justify these "modes and forms of link" between the divine and the human, but this will certainly not imply that the concept of functional logic can be completely made explicit.[13]

2 Descartes and Cassirer: Geometrical Meditations on the Divine Substance

The first study by Cassirer, the one with which he obtained his doctoral degree, is entitled *Descartes' Kritik der matematischen und Naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis*. The initial approach claims that the differential philosophical character of the Descartes' work, with respect to the scholastic tradition, is to be found in the placement of mathematical methodology as the resource through which the unity of knowledge is possible:

> The actual originality of Descartes' doctrine, however, is not yet sufficiently determined and circumscribed by this. It arises only from the other basic achievement of Descartes, in which he prepares the science of the newer time. Through the discovery of analytic geometry, Descartes establishes the modern scientific way of thinking, which finds its mature expression in the infinitesimal calculus. The renewal of reflection on the problem of knowledge thus now simultaneously encounters a new object. Only by this Descartes' philosophy gets the characteristic of true renaissance, that it goes back in the mental motives to the antiquity, but on the other hand creates for these motives own and independent areas of problems.[14]

This statement is elaborated from Descartes' work as a whole, but this approach can be noticed in his *Meditations of First Philosophy*.[15] The central motif of

13 For more on Cassirer's concept of logic, see his "Kant und die moderne Mathematik." See also Cassirer, *Substance and Function*.

14 Cassirer, *Descartes' Kritik*, p. 1

15 Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy. With selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. and ed. by Michael Moriarty, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008.

Cartesian thought is the foundation of all things from an indubitable truth; on that line, in the introduction to this work we find the following: "I have always thought that the two issues of God and the soul were the most important of those that should be resolved by philosophical rather than theological means."[16] Further on, in the first meditation he also notes, "Hence I saw that at some stage in my life the whole structure would have to be utterly demolished, and that I should have to begin again from the bottom up if I wished to construct something lasting and unshakeable in the sciences."[17] In this regard, Kurt Brandhorst notes that the "scientific" understanding to which the author was referring pointed in two directions: rhetorically, toward the configuration of science as a home that stands on foundations that cannot be demolished without the whole structure collapsing; and philosophically, toward the understanding that the ultimate goal of the *Meditations* was intended to reconfigure the method for knowing truth: "Descartes' take on first philosophy will, if nothing else, provide the basis for the new science by offering an account of guiding principles."[18]

In Descartes, according to Jean-Marie Beyssade, the idea of God appears as a paradox in which the knowledge of the divine is the foundation of the whole system of knowledge, even though its knowledge (of God) is impossible for the subject.[19] Beyssade considers that the Cartesian attempt to clarify the idea of the divine implies, at the same time, the acceptance of its existence as a foundation to derive from it the certainty of all existence, thus creating a problem of circularity that prevents showing that God is the universal principle of all that exists. For Beyssade, in Cartesian argumentation the idea of God is placed next to infinity as part of its attributes, which results in a relation between a finite mind that conceives the infinite as one of its proofs of existence, but the validation of which is directly attributable to God. This was something established previously by Descartes in *A Discourse on the Method*: "so that there remained only the possibility that it had been put into me by a nature which was truly

16 Ibid., p. 3.

17 Ibid., p. 13.

18 Kurt Brandhorst, *Descartes*' Meditations on First Philosophy: *An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2010, p. 20.

19 Jean-Marie Beyssade, "The Idea of God and the Proofs of his Existence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. by John Cottingham, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992, p. 174: "There is a paradox at the heart of Cartesian metaphysics. On the one hand, Descartes' whole system of scientific knowledge depends on our assured knowledge of God; but on the other hand, the idea of God is explicitly stated by Descartes to be beyond our comprehension."

more perfect than mine, and one which even had in itself all the perfections of which I could have any idea, that is to say, in a word, which was God."[20]

For Descartes every perfect idea must necessarily come from the power of a superior being since the finite form itself cannot conceive of anything superior of what I conceive as: this is what "I am." Therefore, the mere form and structure of an infinite being constitutes a foundation both ontological (understood as the first substance of all that exists) and logical (understood as the principle of comprehensive relationship between a particular substance and a general one).

This being the problem, according to the Cartesian plan in his first meditation the certainty of knowledge had to be sustained by the indubitable character of the existence of God as the Supreme Being. In the second meditation, Descartes makes sure to answer whether his ability to perceive objects is an act of the imagination or, instead, of the understanding: "my understanding of these properties is not achieved by using the faculty of imagination."[21] At this point, he finally concludes that knowledge is an intellective operation: "bodies themselves are perceived...by the intellect alone."[22] The third meditation sets out to demonstrate the existence of God as the foundation of all things or, on the contrary, the cause of all skepticism: "I must examine whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a deceiver."[23] In order to obtain an answer, Descartes discusses the reasons that justify it being possible to hold any belief, and he suggests three: nature, experience, and what the thing in question conveys.[24] Finally, he concludes on those grounds that it is the subject who "believed in the existence of various things distinct from myself, and conveying ideas or images of themselves to me through the sense-organs or in some other manner."[25]

From this point, Descartes reconsiders the plan of investigation and proposes to study the form and nature of the ideas themselves to determine their objectivity. If the demonstration of their existence does not come from the reliability of the data granted by the senses, then their condition of existence can be assessed from the very nature of the ideas: "since the reality I am considering in my ideas is purely objective, there is no need for the same reality to exist formally in the causes of these ideas, but that it is enough for it also

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20 Descartes, René, *A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences,* trans. by Ian Maclean, New York: Oxford University Press 2006, p. 30. See Jean-Marie Beyssade, "The Idea of God," pp. 179–180.

21 Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 22.

22 Ibid., p. 24.

23 Ibid., p. 26.

24 Ibid., pp. 27–28.

25 Ibid., p. 29.

to exist in them objectively."[26] Placing objectivity as a statute of the object's reality and ideas as a resource through which we notice such existence, then knowledge must aim at the deduction of ideas and their interconnectivity with the subsistence of objects. After a brief examination, he posits that regardless of the object or its representation, the content of such ideas can be false or true, although, given our human condition, in an imperfect way: "the degree of reality they represent to me is so scanty that I cannot even distinguish between it and unreality; and therefore I cannot see why they might not derive from myself."[27] Valuing the idea that the content of ideas is imperfect, he notes that, on the other hand, once the "substantial" form is known, the result is different since it is no longer a question of the singularity of what is perceived, but the general content that represents them: "because they are only various modes of substance, and I moreover am a substance, it seems they could be contained in me eminently."[28]

Considering that of the totality of existing forms, little can be said of their particular content, but, instead, they can be assumed to be substantial forms and created by God. Then one can reach the clear and distinct certainty that substances exist: "By the name 'God' I understand an infinite, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful substance, by which I myself and whatever else exists (if anything else does exist) was created."[29] Although this result, which assures the objective content of existence, rests on the idea of divinity, for Descartes it is necessary to maintain the reservation with respect to the certainty of the content of that existence: "[it is not] possible that they can be derived from me alone. And so I must conclude that it necessarily follows from all that has been said up to now that God exists."[30] The central argument is the impossibility that a finite substance can contain an infinite one and, therefore, the process of constructing the idea must be the reverse: God has placed in me the knowledge of his existence.[31] The evaluation of the validity of the content of ideas, from this point on, assumes a critical revision of the extension between the finitude and the infinitude of the idea of God: "I manifestly understand that there is more reality in infinite than in finite substance, and that therefore the perception of the infinite in me must be in some way prior to that of the finite: the perception of God, in other words, prior to

26 Ibid., p. 30.
27 Ibid., pp. 31–32.
28 Ibid., p. 32.
29 Ibid., p. 32.
30 Ibid., p. 32.
31 Ibid., p. 32.

that of myself."[32] After that, Descartes assesses to what extent the ideas I can elaborate depend on one's own reasoning ability, as he seeks to confirm that the idea of God is a clear and distinct content of the I. Finally, he concludes that the idea of God refers to the existence of the first cause of all that exists: "from the bare fact that I exist, and that in me there is an idea of a supremely perfect being, that is, God, it is proved beyond question that God also exists."[33] However, although the result has achieved the status "beyond question," the immediate examination leads to a new examination: "[if] I did not derive it from the senses,"[34] then the idea of God is contained in a clear and distinct way in my thought.

In contrast to this assessment in the first three meditations, Cassirer's reading in this respect points in a different direction from that developed by Descartes. Instead of placing God as the foundation of reality, one must recognize in pure thought (*das reine Denken*) the basic principle of unity among phenomena:

> The concept of substance develops on the problem of the body: it has the conscious tendency to prove that the reality of the body has its ground and its ultimate root in thinking, not vice versa. Thus, it becomes a critique of the sensually given; a proof that the being of the body is not exhausted in any sensual determination...The body means only the demand of a persistent for all change, but this demand is to be fulfilled only in thinking: so all "existence" of the body is taken back into pure thinking.[35]

The general interest of Cassirer changes the strategy and proposes to show that the ultimate value of Cartesian reflections is placed on knowing the nature of "substances" by means of geometrical methods, even when these are not clearly manifested in his meditations. For Cassirer, the fact that one pretends to place a sense value on the perception of objects such as "wax," is because

32 Ibid., p. 33.

33 Ibid., p. 36.

34 Ibid., p. 36.

35 Cassirer, *Descartes' Kritik*, p. 35: "*Der Substanzbegriff entwickelt sich am Problem des Körpers: er hat die bewusste Tendenz nachzuweisen, dass die Realität des Körpers im Denken ihren Grund und ihre letzte Wurzel hat, nicht umgekehrt. So wird er zur Kritik des Sinnlich-Gegebenen; zum Nachweis, dass in keiner sinnlichen Bestimmung das Sein des Körpers sich erschöpft...Der Körper bedeutet nur die Forderung eines Beharrlichen für alle Veränderung, diese Forderung aber ist allein im Denken zu erfüllen: –so ist alles 'Dasein' des Körpers in das reine Denken zurückgenommen*."

one values the sense that pure thought attributes to particular objects, which would imply that the value of identity is "in" the subject. Thus, instead of referring the continuity of wax to a divine capacity attributed to personal being, Cassirer considers it to be an intellective quality that assumes geometry as the principle of permanence, for only insofar as there is an ideal space where the various attributes remain identical with itself through time.[36]

If Descartes placed God as the foundation through which it was possible to reach full certainty, adducing for this the impossibility of the divinity "deceiving" our senses, for Cassirer, on the other hand, the placement of geometry as a transcendental principle would not imply an equalization or substitution of foundations, but only a reinterpretation of the criteria through which the subject knows with veracity the reality of the object. In Cassirer's reinterpretation of the whole of Cartesian work, it can be seen how precisely the ultimate interest of Descartes is not the theological demonstration of the substances of the world, but the critical knowledge (*Erkenntniskritik*) of being, in such a way that it was necessary to fix a universal foundation that would make it possible to deduce the particular form of all possible objects. According to Cassirer, geometry achieves a significant advance thanks to Descartes when he integrates algebra as a research resource: "The connection of the expansion quantity with the number quantity is carried through in the sense that for all algebraic operations a corresponding geometric expression is required."[37] However, this Cartesian advance and achievement does not develop its full potential but is adjusted to the study of relations between bodies without ever applying it to the understanding of ideal relations and forms.

In the fourth volume of *The Problem of Knowledge*,[38] however, Cassirer offers an interpretation of the possibilities of research offered by geometry for fields other than those of the physical-mathematical sphere. For Cassirer, Riemann's discoveries would generate a profound impact on the way of understanding the

36 Ibid., pp. 35–36: "*Wenn es dennoch gerechtfertigt ist, Substanz und Raum noch in einer besonderen Beziehung zu einander zu denken, so kann dies nur den Sinn haben, dass allerdings die Geometrie die notwendige Voraussetzung für die Aufgabe der Substanz bildet: für die Aufgabe, in allen Naturveränderungen die Identität des Gesetzes zu erkennen.*"

37 Ibid., p. 38: "*Die Verbindung der Ausdehnungsgrösse mit der Zahlgrösse wird in dem Sinne durchgerührt, dass für alle algebraischen Operationen ein entsprechender geometrischer Ausdruck gefordert wird.*"

38 The analysis of modern history of geometry can be found in Ernst Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge, vol. IV. Philosophy, Science, and History since Hegel*, trans. by William H. Woglom and Charles W. Hendel, New Haven: Yale University Press 1950, pp. 21–53.

foundations of knowledge;[39] with the acceptance that geometrical research should start from hypotheses instead of tacitly accepted axioms, what was proposed was to study both the foundations of the object and the way in which the links between matter and form developed. What is relevant in these reflections is how for Cassirer the geometrical understanding of phenomena constitutes a double perspective that, in turn, can be seen in Cartesian philosophy: (1) objects and their individual form are understood from a system of relations; (2) the relations of objects are not mere links of reference, but are part of their essence.[40]

As can be seen in the first three Cartesian meditations, the question considered is how the I can know with certainty the reality of objects. But while Descartes considers that the absolute answer comes from divine perfection—from its ideal existence—for Cassirer, on the other hand, Cartesian geometry would define the general links through which the study of the object is enabled in terms of its individuality. It is important to note that the transposition of the concept of "God" by that of "geometry" does not constitute an exchange of meaning, much less of the foundation of being. Rather, for Cassirer, Descartes' objective of establishing an immovable and fundamental principle represented a high philosophical value, to such a degree that he considered that precisely this consideration of finding the first principles starting from a supreme form is what constitutes the true Cartesian contribution to modernity. Now, the totality of entities had to be studied starting from a universal form that endowed them with meaning and sense. Accordingly, therefore, Riemann's later introduction of "hypotheses" (*Hypothesen*) as a synthesis of experience and ideal forms would represent for Cassirer the decisive step in recognizing that matter cannot be presented in isolation from its universal form, but that

39 Georg Friedrich Bernhard Riemann (1826–1866) was a German mathematician who made contributions in different fields of mathematics. His contributions to differential geometry are considered pioneering as well as foundation of the mathematics of general relativity. Cassirer considers his work fundamental for understanding the problem of space and time as a scientific fact and not just as some natural and internal conception to the human subject. For a wider historical and philosophical analysis see Karol-Norbert Ihmig, "Ernst Cassirer and the Structural Conception of Objects in Modern Science: The Importance of the 'Erlanger Programm,'" *Science in Context*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1999, pp. 513–529.

40 Riemann begins his geometry with the indication that historically mathematicians had not studied the way matter and form were connected, which implied the obscure acceptance of the relation between the axioms and its objects: Bernhard Riemann, Über *die Hypothesen, welche der Geometrie zu Grunde liegen*, ed. by Olaf Breidbach and Jürgen Jost, Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer 2013, p. 29: "*Das Verhältniss dieser Voraussetuzungen bleibt dabei im Dunkeln; man sieht weder ein, ob und in wie weit ihre Verbindung nothwendig, noch a priori, ob sie möglich ist.*"

it can be held together, the task of the investigator being to define the way in which matter and form interact.[41]

This link between the *res extensa* and *res cogitans*—which is the main focus of Cassirer's reinterpretation—becomes more evident from the fourth meditation onwards. Here Descartes elaborates a synthesis of what has been previously achieved, but notes that the examination has consisted in the determination of the possibility of the truth of perception, so he assumes the possibility of having made some mistake. His new strategy consists in determining to what degree the existence of other beings can be deduced from the idea of God in the way that self-knowledge is derived from his perfection: "since I have become aware of the immense power of God, that many other things have been created by him, or at least could be created by him, in which case I too would exist as a part of the universe."[42] With this certainty achieved, Descartes elaborates an examination of his faculties (imagination, memory, understanding and will), in order to determine that, since God is the origin of all that exists, even of one's own capacities, there is no reason to assume that errors are, also, caused by him. Finally, he concludes that there are reasons to assume that the capacity of choice (will) is asymmetrical with respect to the intellect, which makes it choose the false instead of the true. Through an examination of the causes of error, Descartes manages to separate God as one of its causes, although at the same time he considers that it is his design that offers the most perfect foundation for all proceeding, so that even errors (derived from human will) are part of a harmonious universal conception: "I have no right to complain that the part God has given me to play in the world is not the most prominent and perfect of all."[43]

The fifth meditation returns to the evaluation of the content of existence of objects and establishes that although it is not possible to demonstrate the existence of other beings from personal being, he also accepts that the plurality of qualities are not based on the understanding or imagination of the subject: "And therefore these properties were not invented by me."[44] However, with this clarification, Descartes does not intend to diminish the role of understanding and imagination in the construction of knowledge since he considers that a great part of the attributes that we implement on objects are due to our cognitive capacities to establish an identity. At this point, he highlights that among

41 Riemann, Über die Hypothesen, pp. 29ff. See also Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge*, vol. IV, pp. 37–36.

42 Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 40.

43 Ibid., p. 44.

44 Ibid., p. 46.

the forms of knowledge with greater certainty, there are mathematical forms, which serve as a referent to prove the existence of God: "I would still have to ascribe the same degree of certainty to the existence of God that I up to now have ascribed to mathematical truths."[45]

Descartes' next strategy is to fix the unity of the essence and existence of God, who within his perfection brings together necessity and universality in such a way that if I conceive the "idea of God," it is not because of a personal capacity, but because it is proper to his divine being: "when I recognize that existence is a perfection, to conclude, quite rightly, that the first and supreme being exists."[46] This full certainty of God's existence, then, implies that the totality of material objects and geometrical forms are maintained and persist, for God does not intend to deceive us but, on the contrary, to offer us continuity and identity in substances: "And so I plainly see that the certitude and truth of all knowledge depends on the knowledge of the true God alone."[47]

The last meditation inquiries into the material existence of objects and their foundations. Here Descartes considers that their certainty derives from mathematical knowledge: "that, in so far as they are the object of pure mathematics, they can exist since I perceive them clearly and distinctly."[48] From this, Descartes considers as established the general foundations of everything that exists. What remains is only the matter of evaluating the role played by imagination and its differences from pure thought to determine to what extent the perception is of real objects or images. With respect to imagination, he establishes that this is always a representation of other existing objects different from the personal being, while pure thought is a reflexive link. Thus, since a means of demonstrating the existence of other bodies has been fixed by means of the imagination, in conjunction with other faculties such as memory and understanding, which, in turn, are sustained by the perfection of a God who does not lie and does not deceive, then one can again rely on the sensations given to the senses as a pertinent resource for the demonstration and study of other bodies.

Descartes undertakes an inquiry to determine whether it is possible to postulate an existence other than the "I" by means of irrefutable proofs, but he concludes that this task is not possible to achieve: "Perhaps, however, they do not all exist exactly as I apprehend them by the senses since this sensory

45 Ibid., p. 47.
46 Ibid., p. 48.
47 Ibid., p. 50.
48 Ibid., p. 51.

apprehension is very obscure and confused in many respects."[49] To settle this, the author again resorts to the quality of God as a being incapable of deception to confirm the existence of objects and bodies other than his own: "God is no deceiver, and that therefore it cannot be the case that any falsity should be found in my opinions."[50] This assurance, however, does not prevent Descartes from reflecting again on the position and place in which external substances enter into interaction with the personal being and how it is possible that between two objects of a different nature they can generate a sensitive link. In this regard, he considers that it is a quality of our human nature defined by God himself to interact with other substances and thus discern the harmful from the beneficial, the painful from the pleasurable, as well as the mode and mechanisms by which the body moves by virtue of the perception of stimuli and the reaction of the nervous system. After this, the author concludes: "from the fact that God is not a deceiver, it follows inescapably that in such cases I am not deceived."[51]

In this analysis of the *Meditations*, the Cartesian idea of God is emphasized to show how divinity constitutes the general principle of our actions and beliefs, in such a way that methodical doubt can be resolved by resorting to the idea of a first being incapable of deception. According to Brandhorst, the structure of the six meditations makes sense in light of the first, for it is in the posing of the questions that the journey from the second to the sixth inquiry makes sense: "As we progress through the six meditations we will be able to mark our progress (in reverse) against the stages of the first meditation."[52] This clarification is important because it points to the reading that precisely Cassirer had noted in his study of Descartes, namely, the fact that Descartes' entire philosophy of the natural form of the world reaches an important logical consistency, in such a way that it is evident that his ultimate goal was to found the reality of all that exists on the basis of a first form, but following for this purpose a methodology arising from the exact sciences.[53] Finally, according to Pauline Phemister, the original Cartesian plan of founding existence on the idea of God fails when skeptical means are stressed, highlighting other problems such as the "ego" and the separation of body and soul:

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49 Ibid., pp. 56–57.

50 Ibid., p. 57.

51 Ibid., p. 64.

52 Brandhorst, *Descartes'* Meditations, p. 28.

53 Cassirer, "Kant und die moderne Mathematik," p. 1: "*Das Schicksal und die Zukunft der kritischen Philosophie wird durch ihr Verhältnis zur exakten Wissenschaft bedingt. Wenn es gelänge, das Band zwischen ihr und der Mathematik und mathematischen Physik zu zerschneiden, so wäre sie damit ihres Wertes und Inhalts beraubt.*"

> Focusing on his own experience and armed with his "method of doubt," Descartes found in his mind's act of thinking the single indubitable Archimedean point he sought: clear and distinct knowledge of his own existence. Seeing here a link between knowledge and the clarity and distinctness of our ideas, Descartes went on to restore, for instance, his knowledge of God's existence and to argue that mind and body are really distinct substances capable of existing independently of each other.[54]

The above, therefore, would imply that while the idea of "God" was intended to be justified as the foundation of all existing "substances," the method of argumentation depended, in turn, on other immutable and invariant resources which, according to Cassirer, would be found in alternative resources such as geometrical ones. For Cassirer, the great foundation achieved by Cartesian philosophy was given neither in his "ego cogitante" nor necessarily in the idea of "God" as the absolute and perfect being, but in the logic of inquiry proposed to define the foundations of human knowledge. However, the general objection that Cassirer will raise to the French philosopher lies precisely in the latter's inability to achieve a consistency between the logic with which the extensive and thinking substance are governed.

The central dislocation, for Cassirer, lies precisely in the inability to translate the methods of investigation in the natural sciences into methods equally valid for understanding the forms and principles of human reality. Proof of this would be Descartes' incessant effort to demonstrate phenomena such as pain, other minds, and the existence of beings other than his own; by establishing a distance in the terms and possibilities of research between the natural and the human world, what would be achieved would be precisely the substantial and cognitive distinction. Although this relation was intended to be dissolved by adducing the idea of God as the basic principle of all existence and its relations, for Cassirer, the central problem cannot be eliminated because there is no proper condition within substances that guarantees their communicability and, therefore, their relation: "[T]he substance was not consistently conceived by Descartes in the purity of a conceptual function and relation, but besides in dualistic tendency as a detached existence."[55]

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54 Pauline Phemister, "Descartes and Leibniz," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Leibniz*, ed. by Brandon C. Look, London and New York: Bloomsbury 2014, pp. 16–31.

55 Cassirer, *Descartes' Kritik*, p. 51: "*[D]ie Substanz von Descartes nicht durchweg in der Reinheit einer begrifflichen Funktion und Relation, sondern daneben in dualistischer Tendenz als ein losgelöstes Dasein gefasst wurde*."

Cassirer's central critique of Descartes is divided into two parts: the first concerns recognizing the historical revolution introduced by the Frenchman of investigating all reality on the basis of mathematical models. However, for Cassirer, the problem is precisely that Descartes himself was unable to apply his own idea to the study of human nature, which resulted in the well-known division between subjects and substances of the universe:

> Thus, for Descartes' own consciousness, there exist in metaphysics and natural knowledge two areas which are built up from pure principles, but whose mediation cannot be accomplished in pure theory. The "unity" of the two substances, which Descartes nevertheless teaches, has only the value of an assurance on the basis of the immediate testimony of the senses, not of a principle in which it would be represented and substantiated.[56]

For Cassirer, then, the central consequence of the substantial division and Descartes' effort to ground unity in the idea of God, is sustained by a dogmatic acceptance of an inherent goodness of the divine substance, which translates into the only Cartesian argument for assuming that God is incapable of deceiving the subject. Nevertheless, this conclusion, for Cassirer, comes from a weak argumentation and, therefore, lacks logical support.

However, this weakening of the argument of God as the foundation of everything on the basis of his goodness, acquires a decisive firmness and strength in the framework of Cartesian geometry, presenting it as a principle of unity and logical understanding based on the study of experience, and the spatial relations of bodies on the basis of axioms that guide the study of the relations between objects. But the arguments adduced to present Cartesian natural philosophy and geometry as the true foundation of all that exists—instead of the idea of God, as he intended—are beyond the objectives of the present work.[57]

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56 Cassirer, *Descartes' Kritik*, p. 61: "*So existieren für Descartes' eigenes Bewusstsein in Metaphysik und Naturerkenntnis zwei Gebiete, die sich aus reinen Prinzipien aufbauen, deren Vermittelung aber in reiner Theorie nicht zu leisten ist, die 'Einheit' der beiden Substanzen, die Descartes dennoch lehrt, hat nur den Wert einer Versicherung auf Grund des unmittelbaren Sinnenzeugnisses, nicht eines Prinzips, in dem sie dargestellt und begründet wäre.*"

57 *Strictu sensu*, that is the aim of the study *Descartes' Kritik*.

3 Leibniz and Cassirer: The Logodicy as First Foundation

It is now time to study the logical contributions in Leibniz's work.[58] For this purpose, I take up the problem of the demonstration of the idea of God in Descartes, as a point of dialogue between Leibniz and Cassirer. According to Pauline Phemister, one of the objectives of the theology of Leibniz was to determine the type of link that existed between the human being and God since the Cartesian theory had generated a great intellectual debate regarding the nature of the divine substance and its possible foundation of all that exists. In general, instead of accepting that God was the universal principle, the "Cartesian ego" had been established as the first logical criterion through which the rest of the certainties about the world were possible. Precisely Leibniz's critique focuses on the insufficiency of the argument to show the Cartesian intention to present God as the universal principle:

> Leibniz held that the ontological argument can succeed in deducing the necessity of God's existence from God's essence only if a prior proof of God's possibility is given, that is, if it is first shown that it is in fact possible for a most perfect being to exist. Since Descartes provided no such proof, his ontological argument is incomplete and leaves open the possibility that the idea of a perfect being is, like the idea of the greatest motion, superficially intelligible, but on closer examination, evidently self-contradictory.[59]

Phemister herself explains that the controversy between Leibniz and Descartes lies in the very concept of "clarity and distinction," adduced by the French philosopher as a basic requirement for the development of concepts, which in general leads to the same criticism that Cassirer had leveled against Descartes: the inability to recognize a methodological continuity between knowledge of the natural world and the human social world.

For Cassirer, the critique of knowledge is fundamental because it is through it that one can secure an objective means of demonstrating the perceived datum as true (according to the Cartesian yearning), but also because, according to

58 I will take into account here two different editions of Leibniz' works. First, Gottfried W. Leibniz, "Dissertation on the Art of Combinations" and "Critical Thoughts on the General Part of the Principles of Descartes," in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. by Leroy E. Loemker, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1969. The second edition is Gottfried W. Leibniz, *Monadology*, trans. by Loyd Strickland, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2014.

59 Phemister, "Descartes and Leibniz," p. 21.

Leibniz, this is the ultimate task of "logic": to define whether "what is (so) either is or is not (so), or conversely."[60] To achieve this, he proposes a path that Marburg Neo-Kantianism will assume as a central research program, to define what is and what is not across the various disciplines, distinguishing, between "theoretical conception" and "practical application," for he considers that such a distinction reflects the structure of knowledge (theory) and the natural order of the world (practice); however, such a division should not imply selection, but rather they should be sought in harmonious unity. For the achievement of this synthesis, it must be understood, "The end of logic is not the *syllogism*, but *Simple contemplation*. The proposition is in fact, the means to this end, and the syllogism is the means to the proposition."[61] With this fixed as a general criterion for the study of all that exists, Leibniz postulates as a starting point for the definition of content that "One infinite is greater than other," and then distinguishes between divine and created substance: "God is substance; creature is accident."[62]

These general definitions will be assumed by Cassirer for the development of the foundations of his *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* in general and thus his *Das Mythischen Denken*. The central idea by which any symbol, and particularly the religious symbol, is constructed is about the function of identity between a particular phenomenon perceived within the world and the general form from which it acquires meaning. But, according to Cassirer, meaning is not given by the particular action, but by the universal form from which unity between forms can be postulated:

> For the cult is man's active relation to his gods [*Denn der Kult ist das aktive Verhältnis, das der Mensch sich zu seinen Göttern*]. In the cult the divine is not represented and portrayed indirectly; rather, a direct influence is exerted upon it. It is therefore in the forms of this influence, in the forms of ritual [*Und in den Formen dieser Einwirkung, in den Formen des Rituals*], that the immanent progress of the religious consciousness [*Religiosen Bewußtseins*] will, in general, be most clearly expressed [*ausprägen*]. The mythical tale [*Die mythische Erzhählung*] is itself for the most part only a reflection of this immediate relationship. It can be clearly shown that a vast number of mythical motifs had their origin in the intuition of a cultic rather than natural process [*der Anschauung ein kultischen Prozesses*

60 Leibniz, "Dissertation on the Art of Combinations," in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, p. 74.
61 Ibid., p. 75.
62 Ibid., p. 75.

> *enstanden sind*]. They go back not to any physical thing or event but to an activity of man [*ein aktives Verhalten des Menschen ist es*], and it is this activity that is explicitly represented in them. A particular process that is repeated over and over in the cult is mythically interpreted and understood [*mythisch gedeutet und mytisch 'begriffen'*] by being linked to a unique temporal event and viewed as its reflection.[63]

As can be seen, the unity of the relations between religious motifs is not to be found in any of their particular expressions (singing, dancing, fasting, or any other manifestation on its own), but by the ordering of movements with a divinity. For Cassirer, while the logic of myth was characterized by the structuring of the natural world from the affective intensity of the perceived phenomenon (whether attractive or sacred or, on the other hand, repulsive or profane), in the dialectic of religious thought, such ordering from sensations (sacred or profane), were substituted precisely by a conception of a divine substance as the cause of all movement. In this sense, then, religious thought had to be placed above mythical thought because it was necessary to distinguish between the first origins through a conception of divinity understood as "universal unity"—a conception only attained in the great religious systems—rather than a conception of divinity whose vision of unity depended on "metamorphosis." However, the possibility of thinking of mythical-religious manifestations as "thought-forms" is precisely sustained by the tasks proposed by Leibniz for logic.[64]

Leibniz himself, in *Dissertation on the Art of Combinations*, develops this next demonstration of the existence of God. First, he begins with the caveat that body A is in motion, for, quite simply, he postulates that there is a body in motion. This implies, then, that there is something that moves it, for if something moves, there is a mover, which is incorporeal, because it is an infinite power. By the latter he defines an infinite original capacity to move; secondary causes operate in virtue of the primary. After this, he states that since A, which moves, has infinite parts, because any given body has an infinite number of parts, which implies that "A" must be assumed to be a divine or corporeal substance, since, for Leibniz, on the one hand, substance is everything that moves or is moved and, on the other, God is an incorporeal substance of infinite power. In the present state, and since it is not clear whether it is a divine or a corporeal substance (which is why he calls this substance, for now unknown, "B"), but which "moves"—and according to the axiom that dictates that every

63 Cassirer, *PSF*, II, p. 219 / *PdSF*, II, p. 258.

64 Ibid., p. 75.

body that moves is being moved—he defines B as a corporeal substance, since it is in "motion." Since what has been said for A applies to B, Leibniz at this point finds it impossible to define, for both cases, what kind of substance each is (divine or corporeal), but he supposes that either A moves B, or vice versa, whereupon he supposes that either is the cause of the motion of the other. In the case that neither is the cause of the motion of the other and that both are corporeal substances, he postulates that, in the attempt to find a cause of motion, it can be established that C represents the rest and the totality of existing substances, whether "corporeal" or "divine," among which they move simultaneously. In the infinite whole there exist bodies that move continuously. Since C is considered the "whole" of substances, there can be predicated of them an "infinite power" in perpetual and continuous motion, whose cause of motion is the totality of substances represented as the integration of A, B and C. But since neither A, nor B, nor C move by themselves, but by the motion caused by another cause, infinite and incorporeal, whose substance is "cause of the motion" of other substances distinct from it, this would imply defining that substance as "God," since it is the cause of the motion of the rest of the substances.[65]

Demonstrations such as this one are important because they show two crucial aspects: first, that the existence of God can be argued through inductive reasoning, starting from particular phenomena such as "motion," and then arriving at the universal idea of divinity. Unlike Descartes, where the existence of God was justified by means of an ontological intuition—for "existence" is implied in the idea of perfection[66]—in Leibniz the foundation is reached by logical means. According to Leibniz himself:

> the ultimate reason of things must lie in a necessary substance, in which the intricate detail of changes exists only eminently, in the source as it were, and this is what we call *God*. Now since this substance is a sufficient reason for all this intricate detail, which is also interconnected throughout, *there is only one God, and this God is sufficient*.[67]

By establishing the existence of God as a perfect and infinite Monad, Leibniz derives all substance from that same universal principle, conceiving the very idea of God as the logical principle of the foundation of all knowledge. This

65 The complete demonstration is developed in Leibniz, "Dissertation on the Art of Combinations," in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, pp. 73–74.

66 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 44.

67 Leibniz, *Monadology*, p. 21.

argument is developed by Russell, for whom, it is based on the logical analysis of substances, although Leibniz's philosophy offers a metaphysical project: "Leibniz's philosophy was almost entirely derived from his logic, [so there is] no doubt that Leibniz's metaphysic was derived by him from the subject-predicate logic."[68] For his part, Louis Couturat, ratifies the same idea and is surprised that editors like Carl I. Gerhardt had thought that Leibiniz's works could be separated into "mathematical" and "philosophical" writings, when in fact, both are united by the same logical principle: "*la Logique...est le centre et le lien de ses spéculations métaphysiques et de ses inventions mathématiques*."[69]

Cassirer interprets Leibiniz's *Monadology* by understanding them in the first instance as treatises on logic and argumentation in favor of divine qualities. Both Cassirer and Leibniz had as a reference for interpretation the Cartesian project whose objective was to construct a universal foundation with which to assure the veracity of knowledge, but this support did not reside in the postulation of the idea of God—although this was the explicit claim on the part of Descartes[70]—but in the clear and distinct ideas that could be derived from the mathematical and natural scientific analysis of the world. As previously stated, precisely that is the central Neo-Kantian critique of Cartesian philosophy, the assumption that the methodology of investigation for the knowledge of natural objects could not be applied to the knowledge of cultural objects, a matter that both Leibniz and Cassirer criticize Descartes for. Regarding the Cartesian idea of God, Leibniz states that although the ontological argument of St. Anselm expresses the necessity of existence as a quality of perfection, this does not imply that, as such, it proposes a demonstration of the divinity or of its substance, it only expresses that God is perfect, but without establishing an argumentative guide that allows us to deduce or demonstrate it syllogistically. On the other hand, if the interest is to argue in favor of the existence, perfection and infinity of God, a logical principle must be defined from which to deduce or infer the perfection of the divine:

> nothing can safely be inferred about a definite thing out of any given definition, as long as the definition is not known to express something possible. For if it should happen to imply some hidden contradiction, it would be possible for something absurd to be deduced from it.

68 Bertrand Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, London and New York: Routledge 1992, p. XIII.

69 Louis Couturat, *La logique de Leibniz. D'apres des documents inédits*, Paris: Felix Alcan 1901, p. IX.

70 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 44.

> Meanwhile we do learn from this argument the admirable advantage of the divine nature, that if it is merely possible, by this fact itself it exists, an argument which does not suffice to prove the existence of other things. Therefore to have a geometric demonstration of the divine existence it remains only to demonstrate the possibility of God with an exactness adequate for geometric rigor.[71]

Cassirer assumes from Leibniz the point that a demonstration of the existence of substance is not based on the argumentation about the consciousness or reflective capacity of the individual, but on the relations that the particular maintains with a system or general form of knowledge. In this sense, the critical methodology of Cassirer intends to show the relations that the singular maintains with a normative system since it considers that the demonstration of substance and its existence, by depending on a definition from which to establish the modes and relations of the particular, implies then that our knowledge is necessarily relational. Therefore, while in Descartes the idea of God appeared as the indubitable foundation of reality, in Leibniz it is reached through the study of different particular phenomena, such as movement, the best of possible worlds, the ontological argument, among others,[72] from which one can advance to demonstrate the form of the divinity and the way in which this, in turn, is related to each of the existing individual forms of the world.

Cassirer claims that both Descartes and Leibniz had demonstrated the existence of God using logical rather than metaphysical resources, or at least, that their reflections should be understood within the context of logical argumentation, since in both cases the effort was directed to explain how a finite and imperfect being is able to incorporate the concept of infinity and perfection, without resulting in a contradiction. Specifically, about Leibniz's work and his theological system he states: "Thus the theodicy becomes the logodicy: the justification of reason as the last instance of unity, which may not be contradicted

71 Leibniz, "Critical Thoughts on the General Part of the Principles of Descartes," in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, p. 386.

72 Martin Lin, "Leibniz's Philosophical Theology," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Leibniz*, pp. 192–206. Lin explores the various argumentative paths of Leibniz and shows that, as a central interest, the demonstrations of the existence of God are, precisely, studies on the logical foundations and possibilities of the "existence" and "possibility" of the divine as a perfect and existent being. Although this work by Lin does not emphasize, like Russell and Couturat, that the center of Leibnizian philosophy is logical, it does note the value that this aspect has in the thought of Leibniz.

by any alleged knowledge from supernatural mediation and revelation."[73] Thus, Cassirer's aim will be to emphasize the rational value of the Leibnizian work in order to assume from it the existence of a logical unity that proposes to ground the totality of existing forms in the idea of God, but understanding as such a logical result, which we access by means of the inferential analysis of particular phenomena. For Cassirer the *theo*dicy must be equated to a "logic" of the divine [*Logodicee*] since from this path we can find a foundation of the existence of the world and its particular forms.

In *Das mythischen Denken* the logodicy is assumed by the author as the principle by means of which it is possible to dissolve the illusory character of myth.[74] Precisely because it is a logical resource, all religious activity aims to unravel the basis through which the particular action ceases to be a mere appearance or isolated phenomenon or simply ordered by a divine being, to constitute itself as a sacred or profane action.[75] The possibility of distinguishing between sacred and profane action, although at first it depends on a certain capacity of the agent to establish a structure and an emotional hierarchization of an experience, is sustained by an expressive logic between a particular phenomenon and the universal principle from which it is derived.[76] For Cassirer, therefore, since religious activity narrows and depends on a function of expression [*Ausdrucksfunktion*], he must now place all activity within a universal horizon of meaning, where a set of ritual and cultic activities appears as a means of objectification.

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73 Cassirer, *Leibniz' System*, p. 474: "*So wird die Theodicee zur Logodicee: zu der Rechtfertigung der Vernunft als der letzten Einheitsinstanz, der durch kein angebliches Wissen aus übernatürlicher Vermittlung und Offenbarung widersprochen werden darf.*"

74 This is the general problem since Cassirer starts to develop his *Philosophy of Myth*: "Myth... seems to lack any such support and therefore to be forever at the mercy of psychology and psychologism. Insight into the conditions of its origin has seemed to be synonymous with the negation of its independent reality. To understand it was seemingly to demonstrate simply its objective nullity, to see through the universal but wholly 'subjective' illusion to which it owes its existence." *PSF*, II, p. XIV / *PdSF*, II, p. X. See also Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Culture*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1945, pp. 97–102.

75 *PSF*, II, p. 75 / *PdSF*, II, pp. 89–90.

76 This "logic" identified with a cosmological order, in the case of myth, and with a divine destiny order, predefined and dictated by God, in the case of religion: "Mythical [and religious] thinking reveals [a] process of schematization [*Schematisierung*]; as [long as it] progresses, too, discloses an increasing endeavor to articulate all substance in a common spatial order [*gemeinsamen Raumordnung*] and all happenings in a common order of time and destiny [*Zeit- und Schicksalsordung einzufügen*]." *PSF*, II, p. 80 / *PdSF*, II, p. 96. See also Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, pp. 102–114.

The very idea of ritual or worship no longer depends on an isolated action presented as the result and interest of a specific community, but must be understood as an action, the logical function of which necessarily implies a search for principles.[77] Now the believer, according to Cassirer, is not an agent who acts by subordinating his rationality to an emotive way of understanding the world but, on the contrary, acts by virtue of an expressive function whose sense of action is logodicean [*Logodicee*];[78] at this point, he follows Leibniz in establishing that:

> Each monad is entirely independent and self-contained [*Selbständiges*]; but precisely in this particularity and independence it is the living "mirror of the universe" which it expresses, each monad according to its own perspective. Here arises a kind of symbolism which does not exclude, but rather includes, the idea of the thoroughgoing and unbroken lawfulness of all being and all change [*Gesetzlichkeit alles Seins und Geschehens*], which indeed is essentially based on this idea. The sign has definitively cast off all character of the particular and accidental; it has become the pure expression of a universal order [*es ist zum reinen Ausdruck einer allgemeinen Ordnung geworden*].[79]

In this way, then, the particular sense introduced into objects and phenomena is actually linked to a universal divine idea that, in turn, comes from and rests in a first substance from which everything acquires ultimate sense. For Cassirer, it is clear that this form is the "monad" in which every form of expression and manifestation acquires metaphysical foundation, but, above all, logical sense of meaning and understanding. For Cassirer, following Leibniz, it is clear that the unity of the world comes from a first substance, by which all other existing forms are ordered, without losing their own essence.

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77 Cassirer offers a wide variety of examples in his writings as part of his arguments in *PSF*, II, pp. 223–224 / *PdSF*, II, pp. 263–264; Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, pp. 114–119.

78 Cassirer, *Leibniz' System*, pp. 474–475: "*So wird die Theodicee zur Logodicee: zu der Rechtfertigung der Vernunft als der letzten Einheitsinstanz, der durch kein angebliches Wissen aus übernatürlicher Vermittlung und Offenbarung widersprochen werden darf.*"

79 *PSF*, II, pp. 258–259 / *PdSF*, II, p. 303. See also, Cassirer *An Essay on Man*, pp. 119–142; Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1946, pp. 3–15.

4 Cohen and Cassirer: The Logical-Ethical Idea of God

The philosophy of Ernst Cassirer, as has been shown, bases a good part of its central ideas on Descartes and Leibniz, but the structure and general form of the Cassirerian system, in the terms we know it today, finds a decisive referent in the philosophical system proposed by his teacher Hermann Cohen. According to the latter, ethics is defined as "ethics of pure will," since the study of the moral problem [*Sittlichkeit*] must be based on the logical comprehension of "actions and will,"[80] since, in his opinion, neither metaphysics nor psychology, as knowledge that studies the foundations of acting, comprehensively explains the general problem of "ought" and its relation to "is."[81] According to Reiner Wiehl, the central dilemma of Cohen's ethics lies in the understanding of the principles that underlie particular facts since the aim of an ethical vision is precisely the logical deduction of the concept of "good," in order to evaluate through it the mode and coherence of human activity; thus, ethics becomes—according to pure logic [*Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*]—a pure science of human nature.[82]

Ethics for Cohen is a general science that structures and orders two well-defined fields: the first corresponds to the very understanding of the concept of morality, while the second refers to the cultural link that is generated by this conception. The fact that ethics is first a logical knowledge of moral activity[83] implies that it acquires both a comprehensive and a normative character, since it implies that all action understood as an "is" reality must derive from an "ought" that guides and orients the activity to its ideal form. Thus, for Cohen, ethical understanding becomes a study first of the foundations of action, which implies distinguishing between the logical concept that underlies it and the moral activity that is promoted: "ethical ideas are not exclusively ethical; they are also theoretical."[84] However, and despite this distinction, for

80 Hermann Cohen, "Ethics of Pure Will," in *Writings on Neo-Kantianism and Jewish Philosophy*, p. 26.

81 Ibid., p. 22.

82 Reiner Wiehl, "The Multiplicity of Virtues and the Problem of Unity in Hermann Cohen's Ethics and Philosophy of Religion," in *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. by Rudolf A. Makkreel and Sebastian Luft, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2010, p. 274.

83 Cohen makes a clarification in this regard, claiming that ethics and logic are different, regardless of their connection: "Ethical creations—partial and inadequate though they be are still representations of ethical, and not just theoretical, ideas. For that is the basic idea, and we ought not to lose sight of it: *ethics presupposes logic, but logic is not, in itself, ethics*." Cohen, *Ethics of Pure Will*, p. 33.

84 Ibid., p. 34.

Cohen it is important to underline their "logical" character, since it is necessary to emphasize their pure character: "the problem of ethics must also be a form of knowledge—a strict, precise act of cognition. Otherwise, the will could not be pure will."[85]

From the logical character of ethics, a new problem is introduced which, in turn, will become a continuous reflection within Cassirer's philosophical system: the problem of the individual and his or her relations with the community. For Cohen, the human being, as an individual being: "is a member of a plurality, indeed of any number of pluralities. Yet he is also not only that. Rather, he completes the orbits of his existence only in totality,"[86] which implies that only within the framework of a universal ideal can true ideas about the nature and action of the human being be postulated. For Cassirer, these same ideas appear at the very center of religious activity. The human being, insofar as he or she belongs to a cultural community, appropriates and orders the world based on the systems of organization and structuring given by the society in which the individual is born and develops: "The I feels and knows itself only insofar as it takes itself as a member of a community [*als Glied einer Gemeinschaft*], insofar as it sees itself grouped with others into the unity of a family, a tribe, a social organism [*eines sozialen Verbandes zusammengeschlossen*]."[87]

This system of ordering/subordination of particulars to a general system is applied to the study of three subfields: religion (as the study of the universal principles of the good); art (as the study of the possibilities of creation);[88] and politics (as the study of the systems of promotion of the public good).[89] Although it is clear that the link between ethics and all these themes is considered by Cassirer in various works, in this chapter I will only concentrate on the religious phenomenon. There are important nuances between the interpretation of master and pupil. While for Cohen the link between the individual and his or her actions is justified as a way of understanding proper to a historical

85 Ibid., p. 41.

86 Ibid., p. 9.

87 Ernst Cassirer, *PSF*, II, p. 175 / *PdSF*, II, p. 205.

88 In this regard, Cohen considers the linguistic relation between "art" [*Kunst*] and "ability" [*Können*]: "Our German word, therefore, seems so suggestive: 'art' is an ability [*Kunst ist Können*], the *capacity to create and form*." Cohen, *Ethics of Pure Will*, p. 49.

89 Ibid., pp. 46–68. All three aspects are directly related with the Socratic ethical problems developed in the *Apology*. See Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. by Harold North Fowler, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1999, 19d–43d. These same problems (politics, art and religion) were considered also by Cassirer; for an analysis of these topics in Cassirer's texts and their relation to Socratic philosophy, see Esparza, "Las raíces pedagógicas de la *Apología de Sócrates*."

development of the community, for Cassirer, by contrast, it is understood as an expression of a function. In the philosophical system proposed by Cohen, ethics regulates and orders activities according to logical principles so that any form of conception, including religion, must conform both to logic (as the bearer of first principles) and to ethics (as the regulator of human activities).[90] This would imply that a religious conception would be, at the same time, a logical and ethical conception: "Thus, if religion has made contributions to the knowledge of morality that are hardly trivial, then it is a waste of its practical collaboration to reject religion and exclude it from the realm of ethical culture."[91]

On the other hand, in Cassirer, logic, ethics and religion appear unified among themselves and are only distinguished as part of a philosophical exercise.[92] However, unlike Cohen, for whom logical understanding orients ethical action and this, in turn, leads to religious practice, Cassirer assumes the living of experience to systematize the religious phenomenon as a form of vital knowledge, whose framework of meaning refers to the form of culture. The central difference, then, would imply that, for Cohen, religion operates as a function of ethical postulates, whereas for Cassirer, the religious phenomenon depends on the Religious Symbolic Form. What is emphasized is that while Cohen conceives of a logical system of ordering the ethical activities of any cultural activity,[93] for Cassirer, culture is presented as a unitary system in which the various forms interact to, at the same time, unite and differentiate.

Cohen proposes to understand the divine essence as a logical principle that makes it possible to define the concept of pure good, in order to then regulate religious practices. This will imply, therefore, that the idea of God refers to the unity of actions, insofar as they conform to a true concept of goodness:

90 Cohen, *Ethics of Pure Will*, p. 48.

91 Ibid., p. 46

92 If the reader wishes to explore this relation in Cassirer's works, he or she may consider these suggestions. For ethics and religion, Cassirer, *PSF*, II, pp. 199–262 / *PdSF*, II, p. 235–257; Cassirer, "Language and Myth," in *The Warburg Years*, pp. 130–213. For ethics and politics, Cassirer, *PSF*, II, pp. 153–175 / *PdSF*, II, p. 181–204; Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, pp. 142–296. For ethics and the arts: Ernst Cassirer, *The Logic of Humanities*, trans. by Clarence Smith, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1961, pp. 187–217; Ernst Cassirer, "Language and Art," in *Symbol, Myth and Culture. Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer. 1935–1945*, ed. by Donald P. Verene, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1979, pp. 145–218.

93 Cohen, *Ethics of Pure Will*, p. 46.

> [God] constitutes the foundation, not for the relationship in which the human being would be required as the other pole. He constitutes, instead, the foundation for the relationships that constitute morality among human beings, making these relationships possible. Thus, it is not the case that the human requires God for his subjective support; rather, God is required for the objective grounding of ethics. He is, therefore, the transcendent precondition. The concept and the existence of God mean only that it is not a delusion to believe in, to think of, and to take cognizance of the unity of humankind. God proclaimed it. God guarantees it. Aside from this, God signifies nothing, means nothing. His attributes, through which his essence is disclosed, are not so much the attributes of his nature as they are the directions in which God's relationship to human beings radiates outward to human beings and is reflected in them.[94]

On this, Reiner Wiehl explains that, within Cohen's theory of the virtues, the principle of unity is fundamental for the definition of a true ethics, since it is only in the interconnectivity of all the virtues to the idea of God that each of them separately can operate as a genuine individual value.[95] By contrast, for Cassirer, although actions can be sustained by a religious worldview, the general foundation of the virtues, and hence of goodness, is framed in the unity of cultural expression, understood as the ordering of ritual activities, linguistic and artistic expressions, to an ideal form that endows them with religious sense and meaning: "Things and events do not now simply signify themselves but have become an indication of something 'other,' something 'transcendent'."[96]

Cassirer accepts Cohen's pointing to a universal foundation, but instead of postulating the idea of "God," he will present the idea of the expression of the absolute as the principle of logical deduction from which ethical activity and thus religious form can be grounded: "The truth is the whole [*Die Wahrheit ist das* '*Ganze*']—yet this whole cannot be presented all at once but must be unfolded progressively by thought in its own autonomous movement and rhythm."[97] However, the understanding of totality proposed by Cassirer does not differ much from that proposed by Cohen, for whom "God" is precisely the totality while in Cassirer it refers as the foundation of truth; in this respect Cohen maintains the following: "*The concept of God is supposed to secure, for*

94 Ibid., p. 47.
95 Wiehl, "The Multiplicity of Virtues," pp. 276–285.
96 *PSF*, II, p. 252 / *PdSF*, II, p. 295.
97 *PSF*, III, p. XIV / *PdSF*, III, p. VIII.

the eternity of the ideal, the eternity of nature analogous to it. Consequently, its significance does not merely lie within ethics but extends back into logic."[98]

Cohen's effort in the *Ethics of Pure Will* was aimed at showing a methodological correlation between logic and mathematics, on the one hand, and ethics and law, on the other, for he considered that, just as the natural sciences had succeeded in objectifying their postulates by accepting mathematical propositions as fundamental principles systematically ordered to an eternal and immutable end, so the same could be expected of the study of human nature by accepting ethics as the simile of logic, and law as the analogue of mathematics. In this context, as has been said, the idea of God operates as a logical principle since it was established as an immutable and immovable truth, which guaranteed that the idea of the good had to be derived from a reflection of the divine nature in order to stipulate the mode and form of ideal forms and ways of acting.[99] Cohen's central insistence, which will later be highlighted by Cassirer, is to assume the concept of God as the first foundation of all knowledge, which implies that it cannot be presented as a content of faith, as a pure religious expression or isolated from other contents, but precisely as an epistemic and logical content: "God is not permitted to become a content of faith, if such faith will then be distinct from knowledge."[100] Having located this distinction, Cohen presents the idea of God as "totality" and "absolute identity," thus emphasizing that every form of existence is contained in the idea of God, and God, in turn, contains every form of existence, thus raising the problem of pantheism. The central question is whether the full identification of the divinity with each of its creatures should be the ideal of an ethics or whether, on the contrary, it should delimit and distinguish the degree and linkage of being with the various forms of existence.[101] Cohen, then, evaluates the sense of totality and unity by examining various positions and arguments presented in favor of pantheism and concludes that the ultimate meaning and form of the divinity is in the totality of the diverse: "We...conceive of the transcendence of God to lie in the significance of its independent content. Its independent content constitutes the significance of God's transcendence."[102]

Cassirer, like his teacher, was convinced that the logic of functions derived from the physical-mathematical paradigm should order any epistemological postulation and structuring; that was the central thesis of his first great

98 Cohen, *Ethics of Pure Will*, p. 78.
99 Ibid., pp. 78–90.
100 Ibid., p. 91.
101 Ibid., pp. 92–96.
102 Ibid., p. 97.

systematic work *Substance and Function*. But as he would explain in his *Phenomenology of Knowledge*:

> The *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*...has broadened the concept of theory itself [*Sie hat den Grundbegriff der 'Theorie' selber erweitert*] by striving to show that there are formative factors of a truly theoretical kind [*theoretische Formmomente und Formmotive*] which govern the shaping not only of the scientific world view but also of the natural worldview implicit in perception and intuition [*des Weltbildes der Wahrnehmung und Anschauung*].[103]

With this expansion, Cassirer confirms two issues: first, that despite the recognition of valid forms of knowledge other than the theoretical paradigm (perception and intuition), it was still necessary to adjust individualities to a general form of foundation, to which each singular aspect had to be linked in order to achieve meaning. Unlike Cohen, who proposed the idea of God as the principle from which the totality of forms was to be derived, Cassirer maintains only the methodological postulation of his teacher and, as shown in the previous quotation, recognizes three distinct functional modes of acquisition of meaning. However, he places culture as the expression of unity in which the complexity of phenomena acquires form. This equating, which for now might seem distant, can best be equated by following Samuel Moyn's interpretation, for in his view "Cohen equated religion and ethics, as if the first were nothing more than an inadequately justified version of the second."[104] Cassirer himself, in words dedicated to his teacher, explained that "For him [Cohen], the idea of God was the means of developing and perfecting the pure concept of the human being, the idea of the ethical personality."[105]

According to these previous interpretations, Cohen is said to have placed in logic the mode and resources through which the idea of God was to be understood, so that ethics, as a second activity, would regulate activities by founding the totality of actions around a first logical idea. According to Cassirer, this idea was clearly manifested in the passage of the encounter between Moses and God, where, to the man's question, "Who do I say that you are," God

103 *PSF*, III, p. XIII / *PdSF*, III, p. VII.

104 Samuel Moyn, "Introduction," in Cohen, *Writings on Neo-Kantianism and Jewish Philosophy*, p. XVII.

105 Ernst Cassirer, "Remarks at Hermann Cohen's Grave. April 7, 1918," in Cohen, *Writings on Neo-Kantianism and Jewish Philosophy*, p. 179.

answers: "I will be who I am. Tell them, 'I am' sent me to you."[106] For Cassirer, this is the real meaning of Cohen's philosophy of religion: the foundation of the complex logical, ethical, and aesthetic system is supported by the divine "I." This implies that truth, goodness, and beauty reached unity in the full understanding expressed in the dialogue between the prophet and God, with the task of philosophy, in a second moment, being to unravel the meaning and full understanding of this expression.[107]

This general interpretation of Cohen will be taken up by Cassirer to explain that the idea of the divine is achieved through a gradual dialectical process in which the totality of cultural forms (myth, language and art, among others) interact to constitute the meaning of this divine form as the first form and, at the same time, autonomous and independent of the rest of the phenomena of the world: "True revelation no longer occurs in any particular [*Einzelnem*] but only in the whole [*Ganze*]: the world as a whole and the entirety of the human soul."[108] This quotation contains the fundamental core of Cassirer's theory of religion and, moreover, allows us to understand why much of his conception of the religious phenomenon seems to be more weighted toward the study of the logical-symbolic rather than toward the binding character of such experience.

In summary, Cassirer accepts from Cohen the idea that the totality of the system of knowledge comes from a unifying idea, but while in the teacher this idea is the divine "I" which reveals itself to man, in the pupil it is the idea of "culture" in which the totality of forms acquire meaning. However, this does not imply that, for Cassirer, the cultural is a form of divinity, nor that for Cohen divinity is comparable to cultural forms. We are simply before two authors who point to the idea of totality as the universal foundation of particulars, but whose differences and nuances gave way to the construction of similar, but clearly distinct, Neo-Kantian philosophical systems.

106 Exodus 3:14.

107 Ernst Cassirer, "Remarks at Hermann Cohen's Grave," p. 180: "The pure spiritual principle of personality has overcome sense perception or image. The root of the true power of monotheism and its world-historical mission lies in this ultimate abstraction of the 'I.' Polytheism deifies nature in the abundance of its many individual forms; pantheism expresses the unity of the world in terms of the unity of God. But only monotheism penetrates to the core of the 'I,' to the principle and foundation of human self-consciousness, and discovers there the meaning and content of the divine. When the prophets discover a new concept of God and a new concept of the world, a new heaven and a new earth, it is because a new concept of humanity was revealed to them, new in its meaning for the individual and for society, for ethics and for religion."

108 *PSF*, II, p. 258 / *PdSF*, II, p. 302.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of the present chapter aimed at making explicit the Cartesian, Leibnizian, and Cohenian influences on Cassirer's philosophy of religion. It became clear throughout the text that this relationship expressed a "logical" idea of God in three senses (foundational, universal, and ethical), but which, taken together, manifested a single sense in the context of Cassirer's work. Although the concept of logic in Cassirer has broader connotations and explains the relationship between the singular and the way in which it acquires a universal meaning, this is the central result he arrives at through his Cartesian, Leibnizian and Cohenian readings. What is relevant and novel is that the idea of God appears not only as the first foundation of all that exists, but also as the transcendental condition of human experience and, in turn, of the knowledge of both the divine and the totality of existence.

In Cassirer's reading of Descartes, the central appeal is to highlight and criticize the fissure and methodological division between the logical form of natural scientific knowledge and human knowledge manifested in the separation between the cogitating and corporeal substances, but unified in the idea of God as the founding substance of all reality. For Cassirer, this distinction fails when it assumes that such a difference has any sense of reality, for the foundation of cognitive experience that allows us to know the natural world does not differ from knowledge of the human world. The knowledge of God proposed by Descartes, instead of fulfilling a role of first divinity, must appear as a conciliatory center of separate substances divided, in turn, by a human postulate. However, the problem does not lie in this new function introduced by the French philosopher, but in the postulation that such a difference can find such a support in human experience, in the reality of the world. However, although the idea of a God who conciliates is not accepted by Cassirer as a solution to an artificial problem, nonetheless he does accept the idea that there is a first foundation that unifies human experience with a logical idea that gives meaning to everyday reality. Precisely because of this, for Cassirer, there cannot be a fissure between the world of nature and the human world since every first idea founds the individuality of everything that exists.

Leibniz will postulate his disagreement with the division of substances and, by contrast, will undertake a foundation of a first monad that sustains and is linked to other monads that, in turn, are sustainable by themselves, but that remain related to the rest of the forms. This complex character between unity and totality allows Cassirer to postulate the idea of a first form that is sustains the rest of individual expressions but at the same time presents itself independently. The idea of God in Cassirer will not appear as the sustenance and

principle of everything, but only as the base phenomenon of all existence. But instead of postulating it as a supreme and universal being, he presents it as a symbolic form that becomes the basis and sustenance of all cultural expressions. Thus, the idea of myth and religion are universal archaic symbols that, despite being foundational, do not imply or condition the rest of symbolic forms or their modes of experience. In this sense, then, Cassirer accepts the idea of a first monad, from which the rest of the expressions acquire meaning, but which does not condition their peculiar forms or oblige them to operate according to the universal principle from which they come to act as language or science. Each one is independent, but without implying that they exist separately from the cultural unity.

Finally, Cohen takes up the concept of the divine "I" as the first resource and condition of knowledge, but instead of adopting the Cohenian idea in the sense in which the master himself had postulated it, Cassirer claims that the deep sense must be maintained in its logical condition. According to Cassirer, then, knowledge appears only in relation and develops to the extent that there is a universal criterion (as Leibniz had argued), from which to deduce and sustain the totality of substances (as Descartes had intended). In this sense, the logical structure of the religious in Cassirer appears as the development and postulation of the ethical and cosmological principles of a cultural form that becomes evident and singular in the communities. Instead of expressing the idea of God as a universal "I" that regulates the ethical action of these communities, for Cassirer, this principle appears in the cultural cohesion since only in the unity of all forms, in the relation of forms and expressions will the real and profound sense of the foundation appear. Thus, while in Cohen God reveals himself in an act of revelation, in Cassirer the divine will be a work to be unraveled, the ultimate meaning of all interpretation and action. Hence, God, for Cassirer, is not only a symbolic form that represents all religious action, but also a mode of expression, where everything is unified and grounded, that is, a true λόγος.

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CHAPTER 9

The (Non)place of Human Challenges Concerning the Question of God in Helmuth Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology

Jaroslava Vydrová

Abstract

The aim of this article is to introduce the concept of religion, religious experience, and God in the philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner. This theme is not elaborated in detail in Plessner's work, yet we find inspiring and distinct analyses in this connection concerning the situation of man as a being without a home but searching for his place in the world. In this context, we follow Plessner's analyses of the utopian standpoint. This is also the starting point of his anthropology, which focuses on the configuration of experience and conditions that are specific to human behavior, which are important for an understanding of symbolic structures that include religiosity and spirituality. Religious experience here is not merely an extended hand of culture but a specific and necessary response of a human being to contingency and nothingness. This opens up to her or him a realm of transcendence. Helmuth Plessner's conception of religion represents something neither metaphysical nor reductive but a unique contribution to the question of God within the field of philosophical anthropology.

1 Man's Search for a Place in the World

Philosophical anthropology, as a significant philosophical initiative, culminated in the 1930s and opened anew the question of the human being in his or her indeterminacy and inscrutability. Helmuth Plessner, Max Scheler and Arnold Gehlen, as main representatives, formulated in their projects the *perspective of the human* as biologically imperfect and incomplete but opened a search for compensation of this deficiency in one's own realization of the human in the cultural and social sphere—in the performance of human life. On the one hand, philosophical anthropologists point out that human instincts are undeveloped, not so specialized as to give man the possibility of biological "survival." Man is thus an unstable, insecure being. On the other hand, she or he is also a being who can say "no" to instincts and go beyond his or her own

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limitations. To use words of Max Scheler in his emblematic work *Man's Place in Nature*, "the task of philosophical anthropology is to show precisely how from the structure of human being…result all the specific privileges (*Monopole*), performances and works of man: language, conscience, instruments, weapons, ideas of law and injustice, the state, knowledge, the presentational function of art, myth, religion, historicity and society."[1]

There are two distinct answers to the question of God and religion in the platform of philosophical anthropology on which we base our examination. On the one hand, these topics are explicitly present and elaborated in the work of Max Scheler (*On the Eternal in Man*), in connection with phenomenology, revelation and givenness, and with the emphasis on the originality of religious experience as something irreducible. On the other hand, in Arnold Gehlen's work, which is based on his derivation of the early forms of religion and the genealogy of institutions (*Primitive Man and Late Culture*), we can find rather a localization of this question in the network of human needs and interests. This places God and religion in the structure of needs and their stabilization. Helmuth Plessner's approach is specific; we could say that he represents here a third way, neither metaphysical nor reductive, which emerges from the configuration of human experience, irreducible but originally connected to his expressivity and corporeality. It both offers us an interpretive challenge in the framework of his work—where and how to explore this topic—as well as an opportunity to reveal its productive moments.

Human is, according to Helmuth Plessner, *excentric positionality* and *homo absconditus*. This offers the characterization of the human who sees him- or herself as coping with who one is and who ones becomes. The human is open to himself and to the world as well as aware of his hiddenness.[2] This invites us to research in a broad field of subjectivity, experience, and expressivity. By examination of the context and an elaboration of the question of God and religion in philosophical anthropology by Helmuth Plessner, we thus should

1 Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, 12th ed., Bonn: Bouvier Verlag 1991, p. 87. ("*Es ist Aufgabe einer Philosophischen Anthropologie, genau zu zeigen, wie aus der Grundstruktur des Menschseins… alle spezifischen Monopole, Leistungen und Werke des Menschen hervorgehen: so Sprache, Gewissen, Werkzeug, Waffe, Ideen von Recht und Unrecht, Staat, Führung, die darstellenden Funktionen der Künste, Mythos, Religion, Wissenschaft, Geschichtlichkeit und Gesellschaftlichkeit.*")

2 Helmuth Plessner, "Homo absconditus," in *Condition humana* (GW, VIII), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2017, p. 357, p. 359. (Throughout this article, GW refers to Helmuth Plessner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vols. 1–10, ed. by Günther Dux, Odo Marquard, and Elisabeth Ströker in association with Richard W. Schmidt, Angelika Wetterer, and Michael-Joachim Zemlin, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 1980–85.)

follow the situation of the human, her or his being in the world as something specific (*Sonderstellung*). The questions concerning God or religiosity are not elaborated in detail in Plessner's work, and they are not generally explored in the secondary literature on his work; nevertheless, we find in his texts interesting implicit and explicit insights into the field of religious experience and valuable resources for further elaboration. Concretely, we will go through Plessner's works, mainly *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, *Homo absconditus* and *On the Anthropology of the Actor*, to reconstruct his view on the question of God and transcendence as well as to present some inspiring aspects of this question in the paradigm of philosophical anthropology.

In Plessner we can find the place of the question of God in connection with three anthropological principles which he proposes: natural artificiality, mediated immediacy, and the utopian standpoint.[3] The third of these is devoted to the question of transcendence, absoluteness, beliefs, spiritual experiences, and even doubts. What he calls the "utopian standpoint" is inscribed in human existence and connected to the constant effort to find a place of the human as home vis-à-vis non-place (*Nicht-Ort*). This also means the grounding of the space and time of the life of human. As a person, a human does not exhaust her- or himself in factual frameworks given in advance, but rather she or he can overcome what once was reached and can set and assume tasks of the life, such as responsibility and reflection on one's own possibilities. The life of the human does not have any stabile pillar, but rather the human deals with its contingency. How can religious experience arise from such a starting point?

2 Excentric Positionality and the Play Element

A key concept in Plessner's anthropology, as we mentioned above, is the dynamic characterization of what is called "excentric positionality." In contrast to centric positionality, in which the organism is situated in an environment in the manner of the center, in excentric positionality one defines oneself in relation towards the center, relates to it, and becomes aware of one's situation as a kind of contradiction, as an impossibility of founding one's life from the center. This fact brings into human life the effort to resolve this situation, which is always present. At the same time, man's perspective is constantly changing since one is subject to different configurations according to the situations in which she or he finds herself or himself in the world, in society, in history.

3 See Helmuth Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, trans. by Millay Hyatt, New York: Fordham University Press 2019, pp. 287–321.

Hence, we can see that, as an excentric positionality, one becomes oneself in the *performances* of one's own life.

When attempting to define the nature of man, we encounter in Plessner's texts concepts such as indeterminacy (*Unergründlichkeit*), inscrutability, and unfathomability. He also tends to define man as an opaque being: "in some of his later works Plessner refers to the hidden nature of the human being as using an expression, which was originally related to God from the point of view of a negative theology (*Deus absconditus*)."[4] These seemingly vague characterizations are like an exchange of currency in Plessner in his detailed analyses of how the human being finds and manifests himself in expression, how his experience is realized in its duality, as experiencing and being experienced, and how is he involved in relationships and in the establishment of the cultural world. In this context, then, we can reconstruct what might be called Plessner's conception of religion.

One of the fundamental manifestations of life on which anthropological differentiation can be characterized, that is, the way in which man differs from the plant and animal spheres, how he is de-centered or ex-centered, is *corporeality*. "'I am, but I have not myself,' this characterizes man's situation in his bodily being."[5] The corporeality is a leading clue that can guide us in the exploration of the symbolic structures of man, which include religiosity, spirituality, and forms of religious experience. Let us point out that Plessner's anthropology is closely connected to the phenomenological conception of the body,[6] and then, above all, to the philosophy of biology, the development of which was determined by Hans Driesch, Adolf Portmann, Jabuk von Uexküll, and others. At the same time, Plessner's approach is distinctive in how it focuses on the human configuration and does not work with any other interpretive schemes or assumptions, which would come to this consideration from outside. Concretely, we have to do

> *only with the configuration* of conditions specific to human behavior. Whatever components may form the unity of the configuration in which the human being is manifested, none of them can claim priority over it

4 Martino Enrico Boccignonge, "The Duty of Personal Identity: Authenticity and Irony," in *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology: Perspectives and Prospects*, ed. by Jos de Mul, Amsterdam and Chicago: Amsterdam University Press and Chicago University Press 2014, p. 181. Cf. Plessner, "Homo absconditus" (*GW*, VIII), p. 365.

5 Helmuth Plessner, "Über das Welt-Umweltverhältnis des Menschen," in *Condition humana* (*GW*, VIII), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2017, p. 170.

6 See Jaroslava Vydrová, "The Intertwining of Phenomenology and Philosophical Anthropology: From Husserl to Plessner," in *Modern and Postmodern Crises of Symbolic Structures: Essays in Philosophical Anthropology*, ed. by Peter Šajda, Leiden, Boston: Brill 2021, pp. 41–62.

> by itself. Moral-religious decision has here only the last word. Philosophy must therefore be concerned with the liberation of the view of man, if it wants to have a right to the unlimited interpretability of himself, his openness in the world to the world from a historical perspective that is again and again overcome.[7]

We find this passage at the end of Plessner's text, which focuses on the performance of the actor (from 1948), who is a man *embodying* another man in his acting—creating him. This represents a kind of paradigmatic example of how one also finds oneself in the world, what is at one's disposal in the performance of one's own life so that this performance is convincing, so that it is realized, and so that one becomes who one is. Embodiment here is linked to the expression in the role that the actor performs; he is transformed in it, and at the same time he creates a certain distance from it.

Role-taking by acting as connected with embodiment, corporeal behavior thus aptly exemplifies both the particular anthropological principles that Plessner lays out, but there are also other possibilities of interpretation for the anthropologist that arise here, which are related to the various historical forms of acting, that is, particular configurations of the conditions of experience. In cult acting, for example, the characters act directly as actors of a sacred power, the mask here represents the sacred—the gods, the demons. Rituality transcends both the fictionality of play as well as the everydayness of life by participating in the sacred in ritual as sacred action. The individuality of the actor dissolves "because both the author and the actor of the play is a god."[8] However, the situation of the actor gradually alters, and the masks, the stage, the audience change—which goes hand in hand with the transformation of man's situation in society, culture, and history. One could, therefore, go on to consider how fundamentally modernity and secularization, for example, influence the human situation. Here the actor is already dependent on himself, on the interpretation of his role, on his own creative possibilities. He must

7 Helmuth Plessner, "Zur Anthropologie des Schauspielers," in *Ausdruck und menschliche Natur* (GW, VII), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2016, p. 418. My italics. ("*Sie hat nur mit der Konfiguration der Bedingungen zu tun, welche für menschliches Verhalten spezifisch sind. Welche Komponenten immer die Einheit der Konfiguration bilden mögen, in der menschlichen Sein manifestiert wird, keine von ihnen kann ihr gegenüber von sich aus Anspruch auf Vorrang erheben. Sittlich-religiöse Entscheidung hat hier nur das letzte Wort. An der Befreiung des Blicks auf den Menschen muß darum der Philosophie alles gelegen sein, will sie der unbegrenzten Auslegungsfähigkeit seiner selbst, seiner Offenheit in der Welt zu Welt sein unter stets wieder überholtem geschichtlichem Aspekt gewachsen sein.*")

8 Ibid., p. 405.

substitute his own performance for what was previously provided by rituals, ceremony, and patterns of behavior.

It is not by chance that Plessner chooses acting; as we have seen, it captures and describes well the structure of human agency—as incarnation and performance—and at the same time we find here the possibility of thinking about the origins of culture as Johan Huizinga presents it in his *Homo ludens* (from 1938). For the purposes of our topic, we can reach back to his apt descriptions of the playful character of archaic cult rites and also of the sacred seriousness of play, its solemnity, which here is one of the fundamental determinations of play itself. As Huizunga states:

> ritual, magic, liturgy, sacrament and mystery would all fall within the play-concept. In dealing with abstractions we must always guard against overstraining their significance....I do not think we are falling into that error when we characterize ritual as play. The ritual act has all the formal and essential characteristics of play which we enumerated above, particularly in so far as it transports the participants to another world.[9]

According to Huizinga, the play also allows us to penetrate into the consciousness of belief, religion, and the practices that are associated with it. This is because it is not just about imagining, symbolizing, or representing, but also about the mystical merging itself that occurs in the sacred act.

Let us note some other aspects of play that shed light on our topic. Huizinga points to the presence of a certain tension, uncertainty, a dynamic of an antithetical or dualistic nature. In what sense is this significant? In Plessner's work we find this tension in various forms of coping with excentricity—facing and trying to deal with our situation in performance (of the life of the person/play of the actor). In Huizinga, if we follow especially those examples that are related to religious ceremonial play (such as festivities, practices, etc.), then there are, for example, dances, plays, and chants that exemplify such an antithetical character, whether through the combination of voices or the representation of antithetical realities or actions. In the religious tradition we have many examples of the struggles of good and evil, the tensions, the risks that take place between the actors of sacred texts. "The two ever-recurrent forms in which civilization grows and as play are the sacred performance and the festal contest."[10] At the same time, we can observe a certain basic tension associated

9 Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element of Culture*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1949, p. 18.

10 Ibid., p. 48.

with knowing whether the act will succeed, and the courage or resolution to enter into the play, which are prerequisites for the act to happen at all. We have to care about the play, and we must have something at stake in it in order to participate in it. This distinguishes play as a particular exceptional situation from everydayness. Since play is a cultural phenomenon, in the case of religious ceremonies, it is inevitably related to the transfer and dissemination of spiritual values as well as the intensification of life, which happens more strongly the more significant, the more compelling these performances are for the person. This is also manifested on the theoretical level, in the sphere of knowledge, in the case of theological-philosophical disputations, which are based on penetrating to the origin of the world, the good, the virtues in the form of competition in argumentation. Originally, they are based on a sacred struggle of a riddle-like nature.[11] The agonistic character manifests itself in the culmination of culture; according to Huizinga, it is archaic culture that achieves this in its distinct and beautiful form; conversely, its loss is manifest in the seriousness and loss of the sense of play in later periods:

> During the growth of a civilization the agonistic function attains its most beautiful form, as well as its most conspicuous, in the archaic phase. As a civilization becomes more complex, more variegated and more overladen, and as the technique of production and social life itself become more finely organized, the old cultural soil is gradually smothered under a rank layer of ideas, systems of thought and knowledge, doctrines, rules and regulations, moralities and conventions which have all lost touch with play. Civilization, we then say, has grown more serious; it assigns only a secondary place to playing. The heroic period is over, and the agonistic phase, too, seems a thing of the past.[12]

Since the structure of experience and behavior in the performance of the play is similar to human behavior and incarnations in life roles—coping with one's life—it offers us an opportunity to use these observations to diagnose the contemporary situation of experiencing religiosity against the background of an analysis of performativity. The decline of inner tensions of performativity affects the perceiving of a sense of the sacred or the spread of agnosticism. It can be also an opportunity for new forms of spirituality to be thrown into play as previous forms lose their efficacy. One thus not only loses the efficacy of patterns of behavior, but also finds new stimuli, and, by facing oneself in the

11 See ibid., p. 109, pp. 152ff.

12 Ibid., p. 75.

new situation, one responds by drawing potencies from the space for liveliness and searching appropriate expressions.

3 The Utopian Standpoint and the Desire for Home

Now that we have introduced the element of play, we can follow up with Plessner's description of the human situation in the context of three anthropological principles: natural artificiality, mediated immediacy, and the utopian standpoint. The presence of these laws has already been echoed in the theme of performativity. Plessner elaborates these fundamental principles at the end of his seminal work *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, which was based on his research from the 1930s. The first anthropological principle of natural artificiality points to the fact that man must lead his life, become someone, and thus also addresses the question of his place in the world: "As an excentric being without equilibrium, standing out of place and time in nothingness, constitutively homeless, he must 'become something' and create his own equilibrium."[13] This is precisely what the development of possibilities through artificiality serves to do.

The second principle of mediated immediacy concerns immanence and expressivity, namely, the fact that one acts in direct and indirect relations, that one manifests oneself in one's own life, comes out of oneself, strives for something, and thereby learns about oneself, comes to oneself. In doing so, however, it is also true that "human beings ultimately know not what they do and only find out through history."[14]

The last chapter of this work, which introduces the third anthropological principle, the Law of the Utopian Standpoint, and is subtitled "Nullity and Transcendence," is essential for our topic. It focuses, as its title implies, on the problem of the human place in the world: "His own lack of anchor, which both bars the human from finding an anchor in the world and becomes apparent to him as the conditionality of the world, suggests to him the nullity of reality and the idea of a ground of the world."[15]

The chapter in question begins with a Greek pronouncement: δός μοι ποῦ στῶ [Give me a place to stand]. What is the place of man? What is one's home? Man's place is non-place, that is, a place constantly determined by excentricity,

13 Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, p. 288. See also p. 298: "Only because the human is naturally partial and thus stands above himself is artificiality the means to find a balance with himself and the world. This does not mean that culture amounts to an overcompensation for inferiority complexes, but points to a prepsychological, ontic necessity."

14 Ibid., p. 316.

15 Ibid., p. 320.

by the constant effort to create home, by its re- and new-establishment. For man's home is not to be found in nature, where man could rely on the certainty of his instincts. This state has its consequences in being an unrooted person, with the impossibility of finding the core of one's own existence at one foundation. This situation of man creates in him both the need for a reaction in the production of the cultural world as an overcoming of the uncertainty of existence, and through this he also learns of the impermanence of this world of human endeavor. Excentric positionality means that the place we stand on, the place we occupy, is not a stable one; in other words, by being in a place, in the world, in a situation, we are also "behind and above" it.

Although, man individualizes himself, his existence is unique, and his world is specific, nevertheless he is at the same time confronted with nothingness, contingency, randomness—that it can be otherwise with him and his world: "And so he awakens to the consciousness of the absolute contingency of existence and thus to the idea of a ground of the world [*Weltgrund*], of necessary being resting in itself, of the absolute or God."[16] As consciousness loses its unshakable certainty and man loses the stable place of one's own "where," the answer to this precarious and open situation is "a leap of faith" in the form of various historical and cultural forms of his religious experience. "But they all contain an *a priori* core given with the human form of life as such, the core of all religiosity."[17]

The religious core represents a kind of definiteness—in one's responses, consciousness, attitudes, place—that human being in a culture associated with her or his activities does not otherwise provide. This is because it is intertwined with contingency and impermanence and does not create a stable and desirable home. Culture here thus stands in opposition to religion, which also implies its irreducibility: "Whoever wants to come home, to be secure, must sacrifice himself to faith. Whoever follows the spirit, however, does not return."[18] Religiosity is a response to the contradictory, paradoxical nature of our existence expressed by the phrase excentric center. It is a reality that provokes in us uncertainty, absurdity, and instability. Thanks to religiosity, man can find his anchor, his background.

The unity of the world, our individuality, as well as death—these are the circumstances belonging to the form of life that is inherent to man, as her or his being able to be, being able to be other than she or he is, to face the most inherent possibility of one's own non-being. The human situation appears as ambiguous in several respects. This dynamic, this antithetical tension affects the

16 Ibid., p. 316, p. 317.
17 Ibid., p. 317.
18 Ibid.

performance of man's life as well as its articulation in expression, whether it concerns the creation of the cultural world or relationships. This anthropological principle is also manifested in the very constitution of community, in the background of which our individuation is connected to a feeling of the precariousness of human existence that accompanies the consciousness of being substitutable or replaceable by another: "The nullity of his existence, its total permeability, and his knowledge of the fact that we are all basically the same because we, each for ourselves, are individuals and thus different from each other, are the reasons for his shame (and only in a derivative sense the object of metaphysical shame and the beginning of humility)."[19] This is also the reason for another aspect of ambiguity, when one desires to step out of oneself, to express oneself, to create relationships, and at the same time has the need to hold oneself back, to preserve own immanence. One thus finds oneself in a dynamic of conflicting tendencies of revealing (in public) with hiding (from the public). Let us add the intersubjective exchange of glances in the search for the expression of the self as pointed out by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: I am struck by the image of myself that I find thanks to other people, and at the same time, I affect others in the same way: "there is woven between us an 'exchange,' a chiasm between two 'destinies'...in which there are never quite two of us and yet one is never alone."[20]

Man moves between alienation and return to himself, between uncertainty and the search for balance, between non-place and home—in all that man is determined by the law of the utopian standpoint. The knowledge of being homeless forces him to a radical reaction. This circumstance is characterized by an exceptionality, by an urgency. The awareness of nothingness correlates with transcendence: "The familiarity with the negative, with the nothingness, in which the experience of death and in unity with it the care for life find their origin, refers to the '*tremendum et fascinosum*.'"[21] In other words, man's excentric positionality, which is accompanied by his rootlessness, thus correlates with God, necessity, the absolute, the ground of the world. The image of man, his relation to himself, correlates with the image of God, the absolute: "The anthropomorphism of the determination of the essence of the absolute corresponds necessarily to the theomorphism of the determination of the essence of the human."[22]

19 Ibid., p. 319.

20 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from Lectures at the Collège de France 1952–1960,* trans. by John O'Neill, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1970, p. 14.

21 Oreste Tolone, "Gott in Plessners Anthropologie," *Jahrbuch für Religionsphilosophie*, vol. 10, 2011, p. 80.

22 Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, p. 320.

The possibility of insight into such an idea, the basis and order of the world, is accompanied by the possibility of faith, but also of freedom and the possibility to doubt—on the one hand, to doubt the unity of the world, the existence of God, and, on the other hand, to hold the unity of the world, transcendence. This is evidenced by the many theological and philosophical attempts to cope with the doubts that constantly appear, as well as to overcome them, for example, in the proofs of God's existence. These demonstrate man's need to deal with this question and to find an answer to it that transcends the sphere of the purely cultural, artificially created, or social contexts of his life. The option one chooses is also the denial of the absolute and transcendence in atheism or the resignation to the foundation of the world in nihilism. Aware, however, of what is at stake, Plessner points out: "Atheism is easier said than done."[23] Man inevitably encounters transcendence—his acceptance or doubt of it—by the law of the utopian standpoint, which accompanies the uncertainty and the instability of his existence. It also sheds light on the experience and performance of faith, which manifests itself—configures itself—in different forms according to what constitutes man's actual situation. In cultic archaic or tradition-based communities and, conversely, in a postmodern secularized society, these responses are naturally quite different.[24] Together with Merleau-Ponty following Valéry, one could say that there is a certain incomprehensible or paradoxical movement of the spirit when the spirit

> should be a power of doubt, interrogation, reservation, and disengagement which makes us "inalienable" and "unattachable," and at the same time should merge and surrender itself to everything that happens, and that it is precisely by its "indefinite refusal to be anything whatsoever" that it actually constructs and becomes something.[25]

The experience of nothingness and transcendence are not merely an additional part of the anthropological conception, or a free consideration of man's destiny, but form an essential and inevitable part of it. Although Plessner's reflections on religion are only briefly developed in his texts, one could proceed from

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23 Ibid., p. 320.

24 A particular dynamic can be noticed, for example, in the post-communist societies in transition in Central Europe, which are finding their own way of realizing religious freedoms and coping with secularization on the scale from theism to atheism. (See Martin Vašek, "Súčasná česká filozofia náboženstva: Otakar Funda, Tomáš Halík, Jolana Poláková," *Studia Aloisiana*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2013, pp. 5–21.)

25 Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from Lectures at the Collège de France 1952–1960*, p. 14, with the reference to Valéry's *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci.*

the starting point presented in *Levels of Organic Life and the Human* to explore further, precisely, the experience of transcendence, faith, mysticism, etc. Let us mention the conception of Anthony J. Steinbock, as a possibly fruitful phenomenological intersection with Plessner. Steinbock focuses on the verticality of experience that opens up a new sphere of givenness, epiphany, testimony (the moral sphere), manifestation (the cultural sphere; icon), disclosure (concerning the Earth), as well as our dispositions, openness and the appropriate approach, in contrast to horizontality, idolatry, pride, etc.[26] This could represent a productive path to follow from Plessner in the context of philosophical anthropology as a distinct and separate "paradigm," that is, as distinct from theological, ontological or cultural studies.

The possibility to move towards transcendence, to go beyond limits, the desire to find meaning and a foundation in life, arise precisely from the fact that one feels a lack of them in one's own life. Finding certainty and balance means finding a place and a home. Plessner concludes this chapter, and thus the book, as follows:

> A universe can only be believed in. And as long as he believes, the human will always "go back home." Only in belief is there such a thing as "good," cyclical infinity, the return of things from their absolute otherness. Spirit, however, sends the human and things away from itself and beyond itself. Its sign is the straight line of endless infinity. Its element is the future. It destroys the cycle of the world and, like Marcion of Sinope's Christ, opens us up to blessed strangeness.[27]

4 From Contingency to Absolute and Back

For Plessner, religion and faith are an essential part of human life, which stems from his paradoxical situation of excentric positionality: "It is an anthropological constant, which is why man, in the same way that he is by nature *homo faber, ludens, sapiens*, etc., is also *religiosus*."[28] Religious experience, however, is

26 See Anthony J. Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2007, pp. 14–15: "Modes of givenness are 'vertical' in the sense that they take us beyond ourselves. These modes of vertical givenness are testimony to the radical presence of 'absolutes' within the field of human experience."

27 Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, p. 321.

28 Tolone, "Gott in Plessners Anthropologie," p. 81. As Tolone further points out, Plessner's account is not a reduction of God to a product of human needs or a means, as in the

not merely an extended hand of culture, but a specific and necessary response to contingency that opens up a realm of transcendence for man. The need for anchoring, for religious identity, but also for questioning and searching for answers, goes hand-in-hand with his access to himself as an open and free being. This approach may, therefore, find its relevance in new patterns of spirituality in a secularized and globalized society. The other side of the openness of man is also his hiddenness—in the light shed on him, there appears the shadow of his figure that precedes him and that follows him. As Plessner remarks, man, therefore, has a history which he makes and which makes him: "Forced into life, every human being as a living being must first provide himself with the possibilities to live: Artefacts of his past become witnesses of his self-conceived protective shells, which are always exposed to the danger of destruction."[29]

One exposes oneself in the world, sees oneself at a distance from oneself, encounters limits.[30] This provokes in him the need for reaction, action, and the performance of life, which includes coping with tradition, reassessment, and appropriation. The response can lead, as often happens, to agnosticism, atheism or an inclination towards ideologies, various reductive reactions to an excentric positionality, to which we could also add the modern forms of *accedia* as an unwillingness to face oneself or resentment, which is the motor of forms of radicalism. Plessner does not offer solutions in the form of an argument from faith, an apology for religion, or its negation. What he offers us, is a starting point for "our" search for a viable way to cope with the utopian standpoint that today can acquire new and surprising forms in response to the

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anthropology of Arnold Gehlen, for example. He also concludes that, for Plessner, the point is this: "that he explicitly rejects the possibility of a Feuerbachian interpretation of religiosity, i.e. the assumption that religion and God *in primis* are product of a projection of man, i.e. externally projected qualities that belong to the nature of man himself" (p. 83). In his comparative study, Patrick Wilwert draws attention to one more place where the theme of God is found in Plessner and which we have not dealt with in our text. This is Plessner's earlier text *Die wissenschaftliche Idee. Ein Entwurf über ihre Forme* from 1913, where such topics as the incarnation of God, his action in man, and God as the most universal principle are found. Plessner's optics, however, changed after 1923: "Instead of incarnation, Plessner now speaks of 'sensualization of the spirit, spiritualization of the sensual,' no longer as an answer to the scientific-theoretical problem of the supreme universal, but to the question of the 'sensual necessity of our sense organs.'" (Patrick Wilwert, "Religion und ihre Bedeutung für Philosophie und Wissenschaft bei Max Scheler und Helmuth Plessner," in *Religion und Metaphysik als Dimensionen der Kultur*, ed. by Ralf Becker and Ernst Wolfgang Orth, Königshausen und Neumann 2011 (*Trierer Studien zur Kulturphilosophie*, vol. 18), p. 155.)

29 Plessner, "Homo absconditus" (*GW*, VIII), p. 357.

30 Ibid.

nomadism, cosmopolitanism, and multiculturalism that characterizes globalized society.[31]

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31 As Martino Enrico Boccignone points out: "The ironic self can be seen as an equilibrist, always trying to keep a difficult balance between lack of a homeland and cosmopolitanism (*Heimatlosigkeit* and *Weltbürgertum*)." Boccignonge, "The Duty of Personal Identity. Authenticity and Irony," p. 190.

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CHAPTER 10

Philosophy and Religion: Contested Consanguinity

František Novosád

Abstract

Religion grows from many roots. The existential one seems the sturdiest of all. We have always wished to know to what extent we are autonomous in making decisions on our lives and in which measure the agencies beyond human control condition our existence. The radical wing of the Enlightenment project aside, the strategy of modern thinking concerning theology is neatly articulated by Ludwig Feuerbach in his celebrated thesis, "the secret of theology is anthropology." Upon a closer examination of the twentieth-century philosophical conceptions, however, one is justified to suggest that a better interpretational key might be furnished if we hear the alleged grave-digger of theology with new ears and invert the Feuerbachian thesis to read instead that the secret of anthropology is theology. Indeed, not only Heidegger's existential analytic but also Arnold Gehlen's and Helmuth Plessner's anthropological conceptions will assume more clarity if we thread them together with their theological underpinnings.

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For long centuries, there has been much implicit and explicit dispute, across the whole gamut of cultures, concerning human existential possibilities, hence concerning the degree to which we can shape our fate and determine conditions of our existence. We have always wished to know what is in store for us, to what extent we are autonomous in making decisions about our lives, and to what extent the agencies beyond human control condition our existence. Historically, the most potent media of man's self-determination relative to her/his existential possibilities was neither philosophy nor art, nor science, but rather mythology and religion. These symbolic forms would historically give the most influential answers regarding the proportion of what we as humans have made happen and what happens to us independently of our agency. The fact is that mythologies and religions have historically proved to be the most influential and the most frequent way to come to terms with the contingency of human existence—its facticity, vulnerability, and insecurity.

Answers to fundamental existential questions are doomed to forever remain vague since we will never be able to know as much as we would wish to, or to

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be capable of accomplishing everything we would like to. In any case, the questions concerning the possibilities of the human species, of oneself as an individual, belong, from both the pragmatic and the existential points of view to those of uttermost importance. The roots of religions have most probably something to do with becoming aware of the fact that so much in our lives, perhaps, things most essential for us, may well not depend on our own decision-making, but instead on our quest for the answer to the question as to who is in charge.

Religion grows from many roots. The existential one seems the sturdiest of all: human salvific longings and a drive towards harmonious participation in the oneness of the universe. From the anthropological point of view, religion is a way for an individual to come to terms with the doubtful sense of her/his existence, hence with vulnerability, which allegedly is inherent to the human condition. Religion looks for ways to overcome this deficit of meaning as well as the precariousness flowing from it. Religion has proposals for how to come to terms with that concomitant anxiety. All religions, at all times, comprised as their intrinsic component a maneuver for coming to terms with the suffering, insecurity, and the troublesome facticity of human life. In this light, religion has performed a therapeutic function, offering consolation amid the ruin of the world.

The above acquires more sense if girdled by reference to "myth." The term is, in everyday parlance, used in several loosely overlapping meanings. Myths, thus, are commonly referred to as, on the one hand, statements having "nothing" to do with reality. On the other hand, they intrude upon us as something commonplace, hence something that shapes our "optics" of the surrounding world as well as our actions. However, the term primarily denotes, in anthropology, clusters of narratives typical of prehistoric societies. It is precisely myths that constitute the very first attempt at fathoming man's position in the world, the earliest effort to venture answers to fundamental existential questions.

What are characteristics of myth as an account of the world typical of a primordial society? First and foremost, to iterate, what is imperative to bear in mind is that myth presents the earliest attempt to make sense of the world as a totality and of man's place in it. The picture of the world, spontaneously pieced together, is an aggregate creation of a particular ethnos or a specific tribal community. Mythology *as such* is inconceivable; it is always predicated, "belongs" to this or that concrete society. Mythologies of individual ethnics and ancient communities differ in terms of their contents. Still, concerning the formal structures, they display striking similarities, so much so that some authors were even inclined to claim *a priori* matrices behind specific mythological tales.

Myths are made up of accounts that marry imaginativeness with emotionality. Myth knows no difference between images and reality. Mythical

consciousness takes in the world represented in the element of narration without asking questions or looking for causes. Mythical narratives reflect the world as homogenous, drawing no dividing lines between nature and society. Myth exercises no discernment between a thing and its name, between an object and its properties, between life and death, or between dreams and reality. Myth is distinguished by a peculiar sort of grasping causal chains. Anything in it is hitched to everything. A coincidence in time mutates, in its wake, into a causal relationship. Associative links are at once transformed into those of agency. Lastly, space and time receive in myth a distinctive treatment. Space is perceived as a complex of qualitatively defined *loci* clustered around the specific center. Time, too, is grasped as a concrete, qualitatively defined flux of happenings and occurrences. The past constitutes the central dimension of mythic time. Any mythology features narratives of the golden age, of the Garden of Eden, from which man was banished. The point there was exactly *that* serene, ongoing, living past, and leading a good and righteous life implied mimicking the past.

One of the salient features of mythical consciousness is a merging of language and thinking, more neatly, a peculiar type of imagination, of "awareness of reality." Imagination, "thinking," is not severed from words, making no difference between the interdependences obtaining among things and those emerging at the level of words. The word merges with the intended thing. Critical consciousness, conversely, separates words from things. However, such a break is only plausible once we realize the consequences of speaking about words instead of doing so about things.

Initially, the word is a word about a thing: it refers to the intended thing, bestows a name upon it, stands for it, occasionally even substituting for it. However, for mythical consciousness, the word exists solely in its relationship to the named and the signified. It is precisely this bond of the word to its object that enables their fusion and the ensuing substitution of the word for the object. The word, then, provides access to the thing, but at once conceals it; what is more, it replaces it. Myth is marked by sociomorphic accounts of reality where nature is treated *ex analogia* with society. Mythologies perceive the world by analogy with the family; they look for affinities and divergences, personifying the forces of nature, such as gods and goddesses.

It is commonplace to regard myth as something left behind, something which belongs to time immemorial. We rarely consider the likelihood of anyone living by myth and seeing the world really with its eyes. The impression of its antiquatedness grows yet more robust once one attends to the contents of mythological tales. With regard to content, myth has today gotten closer to a fairy-tale and is thought to be just another type of it.

Nevertheless, if one is to arrive at different conclusions, the form and structure of mythical thinking should be examined more rigorously. Hardly will one dare, in this perspective, to interpret myth as something which belongs exclusively to the past, something which is irrelevant to the contemporary man. That then implies that myth constitutes something that rational thinking has still to come to grips with even nowadays; something it manages but with difficulty to oust into the realm of dreams and reveries. We can experience mythical reality in the form of daydreaming and fantasies. In our daytime reveries, we do not much consider the world's autonomy or "self-lawfulness." Everything appears to be happening in response to our volition. Reality "fuses" with our idea of it. We notice no apparent difference between content-related and causal connections. Rational thinking, by contrast, is primarily a faculty for differentiating between our desires and the world of facts, as well as their interconnectedness; it is hence a faculty for unceasingly reminding man of the distinction between reality and her/his interpretation of it. Myth, in turn, draws no dividing lines between reality and the account thereof; myth can only grasp the collision of diverging opinions in moral terms.

It is hard to trace an undisputable dividing line between mythology and religion. It is true that religions are connected to mythologies, yet the former at the same time drive out the latter. Religion "superseded" myth by appropriating and absorbing it, by subsequently accommodating its components into the new context. The sublation was accomplished in the form of a dialectical negation, which implied not just a pure cancellation, but also a preservation of certain elements and their ensuing incorporation into new contexts to reach an elevation. The difference which cuts mythology and religion in two can be made clear in no other way but by combining several factors. One may lastly claim that both in mythologies and in religions, there are included the very same operational elements, the incongruence of which is only noticeable in their arrangement and patterning.

First, let us consider a line of differentiation that partitions polytheism and monotheism. Mythologies tend to be polytheistic, whereas religions are prevailingly monotheistic. Simultaneously, some monotheisms surreptitiously preserve elements of polytheism. In Christianity, to exemplify, this goes for the Holy Trinity, the cult of saints, or the cult of Mother of God. These lend themselves to being interpreted—at minimum from the semiotic point of view—as elements, or at least as traces, of polytheism. The second line dividing myth and religion is determined by the manner in which teachings about gods were systematized. Polytheisms are tightly conditioned by the circumstances of their place and time, while monotheisms, through systematization, endeavored, with a view to universalization, to wean off from their specific time-space.

A fully unfurled religion must be seen as an institutional complex of faith, ritual, and the interpretation of the world, including the place of the human in it. Faith provides the foundation, its inalienable component being the conviction of man's dependence on her/his seniors or on the superior being. Such faith is manifest in and enforced by observing rituals—a series of solemn actions performed to recognize said subordination. Thus, a consolidated set of rituals forms the ground for making sense of the world and framing tight rules that control the ways in which obedience to the supreme being is recognized and shown. Supervision over compliance with the established rules is entrusted to a designated institution. Those who speak of an institution unavoidably speak of a hierarchy. At issue here are multi-tiered ladders of authority figures who "administrate," human dependence on higher agencies.

Institutionalized faith, rituals, and the administered image of the world reciprocate in bolstering one another. Faith will generate rituals, while these, in turn, will maintain a specific grasp of the world. Institutions will keep and strengthen rituals, which reciprocate by building up faith. At the same time, it is important that we should not lose sight of the tensions felt among faith, ritual, and the image of the world. Faith tends to defy ritualization, while ritual, however, fortifies institutions. Faith operates as the source of buoyancy, while rituals and institutions serve as conservative factors. The institutionalization of religion has, in turn, contrived for the course of whole historical epochs to camouflage the loss of faith and the deficit of existential cogency in rituals.

From the angle of history, philosophy and religion can be characterized as competitors, albeit competitors reciprocally sustaining each other. Both are anxious to offer a coherent picture of the world of their own and determine the place of man in Being. In substantiating its truths, religion cites revelation; philosophers prove theirs by invoking the rules of logic and evaluating the findings of observation and experiment.

It turned out, however, that the truths buttressed by rational consideration and the assessment of experience fail to cover the whole panoply of truths proffered by religion. Science has nothing to say regarding quite a few subjects attended to in religious discourse. The point is how this shortcoming of science is to be interpreted. Militant scientism proceeds from the conviction that what is not articulable in the language of science will of necessity be either fiction or art. We can carry on a dispute about the utility of fiction—can't we?—and its existential sense, yet fiction is merely what its name suggests: it lacks any epistemological relevance.

As for art, it wittingly and programmatically positions itself as distinct from science and has never been its rival. One might choose to try and treat religion as something analogous to art, in which case, however, religion will be robbed

of its spiritual sense. Religions provide a "total" comprehension of the world. Every social collectivity can, aided by religion, define its position in the world. Religion, after all, also gives any individual a possibility to grasp and come to terms with hers/his place in the universe. It is, again, religion that endeavors to give unity to life, while philosophy constitutes just an auxiliary effort to remodel the mosaics of life into a system. However, today's philosophy has relinquished such ambitions, thereby allowing room for the religious agenda.

Religions have advanced their cause wielding a specific grasp of truth. Truth in religion is not a correspondence between thought and reality, as epistemological realists will insist, nor is it the internal consistency of ideas. Religious truth is, above all, an agreement between a personal will and the norm of life as identified by the supreme being. The phenomenon of truth, thus, coincides with that of authenticity, of a righteous way of life.

There is a certain schematism or logic to the relationship between philosophy and religion. At the paradigmatic level, the correlation was problematized already in Late Antiquity. The prevalence of Christianity in the ancient world is commonly accounted for as a response to the moral decay of the society at the time. An intense loathing for the pervasive demoralization cried for the radical solution to the plight. Ancient thinkers were instrumental in proposing conceptions of life that showed the way out for the individuals. Stoicism, Epicureanism, skepticism, at last even Neoplatonism, all were blueprints as to how an individual person was supposed to defy the iniquity of the day and conduct an examined, responsible life. As their kernel, all these conceptions of life embraced asceticism as an individual act that contents itself with just its own performance. Individuals were supposed to control their needs and imagination, hence becoming more self-sufficient and reducing their dependence on the outside world. *Autarkia* and *ataraxia* were ideals to look to and pursue. From these teachings, epochs to come, and above all modernity, would borrow and appropriate the idea of human autonomy to elaborate and codify.

What is, however, the extent to which these conceptions and Christianity at large answered the demoralization of the day? Put differently, to which extent were they something comparable to fighting one's way upstream against the current or perhaps rowing downstream with it? Friedrich Nietzsche suggested that we would get a better grasp of those times if we chose to perceive the religious teaching cited as the "voice" of the epoch, therefore, as a signal of the moralization of life, rather than a response to its demoralization. Christianity was able to get the upper hand precisely because Late Antiquity had already prepared the appropriate breeding ground by having moralized "reality." Christianity could have taken root, with its concept of the original sin as the central category of human existence, for the "general anthropology" of the world had

been already underpinned by the notion of man as a finite, vulnerable, and suffering creature.

The ancient moralists were anxious to help individuals shake off their dependence on the outer world, and Christianity headed generally in the same direction, insisting nevertheless that man could get rid of that bondage only once she/he had realized their dependence on God as transcendent to the world. An individual relying solely on herself/himself stands no chance in the struggle for autonomy, for attaining independence from the surrounding world; he or she is just bound to give in. No sooner than she/he obtains support from God, he/she becomes fit enough for swimming against the current. This instant was uniquely articulated in St. Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustinian thinking rests on the insight that man, to retain his humanity, needs help from the outside, from the on high above, from God.

However, the dissemination of Christianity ought to be seen in its whole breadth and depth. In a political perspective, the struggle for the consciousness of the upper strata of society was quite significant, yet much more so was the conquest of the popular consciousness. It is, then, appropriate to pose queries not just as to what Christianity had on offer for a man of letters, a high-ranking clerk, or a wealthy merchant, but equally as to what Christianity brought to the "man on the street," a farmer, or a formerly enslaved person. Moreover, Christianity admits of being grasped as a response to the "multiculturalism" of the Roman empire at the advanced stages of its evolution: the empire badly needed a unifying spiritual framework.

So then a common denominator for connecting such ethnically divergent societies, as were the ancient *poleis* at the turn of the pre-Christian era, was felt as an urgency, and Christianity seemed to make a perfect candidate for the role. Its teaching appealed to the individual and promised to usher her/him into a new collectivity which was above the ethnic communities and the different social strata. Moreover, Christianity came up with the conception of life, under which it was possible to subject to norms not only individual lives but also those of entire societies.

Among the most significant factors conducive to the prevalence of Christianity in the ancient world was the fact that it offered participation in an entirely novel type of human aggregation. That society transcended ethnic and social determinants. Members of such a motley collectivity could feel on a par, for all their ethnic-social-cultural diversity, with other participants of the same community. The word became flesh, and the idea became a real power. Ideas, moral principles, and life orientations brought forth by Christianity metamorphosed into the force that began to affect the broad masses of people, institutions, empires, and states.

The penetration of the Christian idea would come in many formats and guises. One might think of it as of a slow yet incessant pressure, as of the proverbial drop of rain (*Gutta caveat lapidem non vi sed saepe cadendo*) that "makes a hole in the stone, not by violence but by often falling." The ideological and moral pressure of Christian values that was brought to bear on all spheres of life assumed at times more oblique, and even contorted forms.

Christianity proved capable of responding to local idiosyncrasies, yet in a manner which allowed these to become integrated into the universal scheme. Inherent to this capability of amalgamating the local was also the process of the quick intellectualization of Christianity. Notably, the process was not happening at the expense of imaginativeness; that is, it did not gnaw at Christianity's ability to appeal to broad sections of the population. It is precisely the marriage between high intellectuality and lively imaginativeness appealing to great masses that distinguishes Christianity up till now. It is true that there were times when the intellectual component was lacking, but there were also other times when Christianity would fall short of its influence upon the popular imagination. Luckily, these processes would typically unfold out of sync and, therefore, posed no threat to the existential buoyancy of the Church or the unity of its religious life. One is justified to talk of "crises" in the Church's history only at such junctions where the two components are in a recession simultaneously.

Religion has ever been politically-minded, as it were, and it was so on several accounts. The first one flows from the character of religion and politics. Any religion claims the "whole" person and wants to provide orientation and guidance of her/his life and thought. Politics will make very much the same claims or at least rather similar ones. It too "bothers" with everything or may, under certain circumstances, oversee everything. That explains why any politics has to deal with religion and *vice versa*. The two have to find a way of co-existence. All current religions will make themselves known as those preaching love of the neighbor and as guarantors of peace. Christianity, alongside Hinduism and Islam, indulges in highlighting its pacific disposition. Nevertheless, when one casts a historical glance at religions, she/he discovers that not infrequently religious authorities would instigate intolerance and fanaticism. Gods hate other gods, and God begrudges another God. God is gracious to his people and merciless towards aliens. One may wonder to what extent this duplicity is inscribed right in the nature of religion and the degree to which it has been taken advantage of as a mask meant to conceal someone else's aggressive intentions. One is sure to come across episodes where religion let itself become embroiled in conflicts having nothing in common with its nature or mission. Much more often, however, one is sure to stumble upon conflicts where religion is known for a fact to have been the trouble-monger.

In medieval Europe, the Church commanded an immense scope of authority, even claiming for itself the position of an institution entrusted with conferring the royal powers. Often the largest landowner in the country, it at times held more powers than kings or queens, the latter not infrequently being heavily dependent on clerical support. Thrones were usurped and emperors created with papal approval. The Church wrested for itself the exercise of legitimating authority, which led to tightening the bonds between it as the supreme spiritual authority and the state as the highest temporal one. The destinies of the two supreme institutions became inextricably linked. However, it needs be underscored that the temporal authority was trying to pull out from the embrace that was too tight for discretion and comfort. The relationship soured to the point of a cold war. Following the Peace of Westphalia, however, Christian churches tuned in to the changed political circumstances, enthusiastically letting the secular power take advantage of the legitimating authority of the Church—as well as of its opportunistic subservience—and apply it to sanctifying the new order encoded and embodied in freshly signed treaties and redressed borders.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, the Church's political influence was on the wane; hence, the Church primarily encouraged its followers to participate in politics directly. This is the time when Catholic political parties were being formed. It might appear that, at the end of the eighteenth century, the Church was falling into oblivion like other feudal institutes and institutions; it seemed inseparably interwoven with these. Such was at any rate the picture as envisioned by the Enlightenment thinkers. However, the Catholic Church survived the maneuver of getting weaned off from the state without violating its own identity. It considered the reduction to its legitimating authority and set out to look for fresh modes of cohabitation with newly emerged forms of societal organization, which were already predicated on the legitimation of power "from below," that is, by consent of the ruled. In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church had to come to terms with the shock of the revolution in France. In the latter part of the same century, it seemed to have definitively lost touch with the reality of modern society. If belatedly, the Church was, nonetheless, in time to have its say in the social issues, which seemed crucial in the nineteenth century. The Church even managed to find its *modus vivendi* with the systems of liberal democracy, which were the order of the day in the second part of the twentieth century.

It seems next to impossible to briefly recapitulate the relationship obtaining between religion and philosophy or between theology and philosophy in the modern age. However, it would not be wrong to suggest that the overwhelming number of the representatives of contemporary philosophy

considered secularization as one of the most typical features of modern times. The mainstream of modern thought treated secularization as the essential trend in the progression of modern society. Secularization has several dimensions and results in the shift of the church's place in the community. Churches lose their privileged status and, from the legal point of view, are seen as just one of the organizations of civil society. Religion is relegated to the private sphere, gradually shedding its public authority as a legitimating institution.

Theology is either marginalized in the intellectual sphere or overtly viewed as a museum exhibit. Yet, as part of secularization, another approach to theology was to be seen, namely the grasp of the latter as a complex of mystified accounts of real problems. Ludwig Feuerbach paradigmatically articulated such a stance. For him, the truth of theology rests in anthropology, which means that religion and theology are justified only inasmuch as they can reflect reality. In case, however, that they misrepresent and distort it—and today, one need not mince words regarding that—we can do without the aid of their fancy inventions and figments of imagination. In this context, if religion and theology retained any residual significance (though one cannot be all that sure about our days), it was just due to their ability to "detect" problems, which are today, however, rationally tackled and resolved with recourse to modern psychology, sociology, or philosophy.

Over the nineteenth century, the process of secularization was visible to the naked eye, as it were. Challenged by the Enlightenment ideas, the intellectual reputation of the Church tangibly declined. The "secular" forms of legitimation of power gained the upper hand. The Church lost its knack for answering the issues of its time, both in intellectual and practical spheres. In the theoretical field, the Christian tradition failed to provide a fertile background for any "conception" of modern times. Nineteenth-century thinkers engaged with Christianity were interested in what the world *should* look like rather than in what it *was* like, why it "functioned" like it did, or which forces made it tick.

Yet it seems as if the secularizing trend has come to a stop nowadays. Religion experienced, in the latter part of the twentieth century, its comeback into public life. It returned in a couple of guises. First, it reemerges as an interest in existential questions, the ones of sense and meaning. Equally, religion comes back as a pledge of society not to be bound exclusively by pragmatic and power interests. The appeal of religion across societies that underwent the process of individuation stems from the fact that it gives room for the creation of unselfish types of community. Faith has a propensity for joining, whereas individualism is not for everybody—not all of us are capable of bearing it, of saying in earnest something to the effect "I do not need anybody." Nor is each of us lucky

enough to have found a natural niche providing shelter from the adversities of the increasingly more toxic environment.

The twentieth century, one should not fail to remark, saw a return to the public sphere of the forms of religion that had not been subject to the process of rationalization. This is true of the versions which appeal straightaway to emotions and position themselves as the only exegetes of the Word of God. There is, thus, created a direct connection between religion and world activism: an immediate bond between faith and instrumental rationalism provides the ground for fundamentalism.

The radical wing of the Enlightenment project aside (where contemplating theological issues was viewed as a complete and utter waste of time), the strategy of modern thinking concerning theology is neatly articulated, to reiterate, by Ludwig Feuerbach, in his celebrated thesis, "the secret of theology is anthropology" (which was further extended by the addition of "and physiology"). He sees religion in the context of the human essence. His critical doctrine probes the grounding of religion in the feeling of the dependence of man on being and beings distinct from herself/himself, often unseen and inimical to her/his intentions and designs, to the point of her/his physical destruction.

Attacking the false, scholastic, theological understanding of the essence of religion, Feuerbach posits the necessity of "the philosophy of the future" to substitute for the hollowed religiosity and address anthropologically, excluding neither perception nor imagination, the issues of human finitude. For him, considering its contiguity to religion, philosophy might, in a mode of complementarity, help conceptualize and adequately formalize the eternal, existential questions raised by theology. These have to be decoded, deciphered, demystified, and translated into the conceptual language of science and contemporary philosophy (which thus prompts a need for a new, reframed philosophy free from its metaphysical inhibitions). Feuerbach's approach constitutes the limit case of the "positive" critique of religion and the one which, if not explicitly, circumscribed the framework for discussions on the relationships obtaining between religion and philosophy or between religion and theology.

Upon a closer examination of the twentieth-century philosophical conceptions, however, one is justified to suggest that a better interpretational key might be furnished if we hear the alleged grave-digger of theology with new ears and *invert* the Feuerbachian thesis to read instead that the secret of anthropology is theology. Indeed, not only Heidegger's existential analytic, but also Arnold Gehlen's and Helmuth Plessner's anthropological conceptions will assume more clarity if we thread them together with their theological underpinnings.

The suggested *inversion* of the thesis advanced by the godfather of "religious anthropology" clearly points to the necessity to reframe the dialogue between

philosophy and theology on both theoretical and existential grounds, fully integrating thought and feeling. When we consider the most recent tectonic shifts in the human condition and their reflection in the medium of different symbolic forms, such a cross-disciplinary project, if materialized, might encourage a wealth of paradigmatically important questions.

A purely secular attitude to religions that consists in our recognition of the question of "What can we hope for?" as justified, while at once confessing to our inability to deliver a relevant answer to the question posed, is rather an exception. Immanuel Kant's insistence that we have to ask questions which we are unable to answer is only possible in situations where religion loses its apparent persuasiveness.

Philosophy, too, has been trying to establish itself as a therapy, as a support in an existential crisis. Philosophy, too, wants to console. Philosophical ideas were to become something like crisis management to furnish instructions on how to overcome one's personal life crisis. The Stoics, for their part, were convinced that understanding the nature of the universe is instrumental in inculcating resistance to stress and adversity as such. They did not believe in the "historicity" of suffering.

By no means is a mythical mentality a matter of the past; rather, it may be regarded as the background, concealed and concealing itself, of all attitudes we take to the world. The mythical mentality also proves capable of overpowering science in some social and historical configurations. In such situations, remarkably enough, rationality, in its crusade against mythical mentality, enlists the help extended from religion.

Translated by PhDr. Emma Nežinská, PhD.

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PART 4

Politics and Social Sciences

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CHAPTER 11

Nietzsche in Dialogue with the Hegelians in the Attack on Christianity and Modern Culture in *The Anti-Christ*

Jon Stewart

Abstract

Nietzsche is not generally associated with the stream of nineteenth-century philosophy that begins with Hegel and runs through the Hegelian schools. While thinkers such as Feuerbach, Strauss, Bauer, Marx, and Engels all studied either with Hegel himself or his students, Nietzsche belongs to a later generation and never studied in Berlin. On the face of it, he does not seem to have been influenced profoundly by Hegel as were these other figures. Nonetheless, I wish to argue that he was involved in some of the same discussions that exercised these thinkers. Most obviously, like them, he believed that there was a crisis in modern Europe and that an important part of this had to do with religion. Specifically, the article tries to show that Nietzsche has a theory of alienation that is usually associated with figures from the Hegelian school such as Feuerbach and Marx.

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Nietzsche's only real sustained discussion of the Hegelians can be found in the first essay from his *Untimely Meditations* that is dedicated to a critical

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examination of David Friedrich Strauss' *The Old Faith and the New*.[1] In this, his last work, Strauss rejects Christianity and theism (designated "the old faith") in favor of the modern worldview based on scientific reason. One would think that Nietzsche would be sympathetic to Strauss' criticism of Christianity, but in fact his essay is rather negative. In his autobiography *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche recalls the positive critical reaction to his work on Strauss. He mentions explicitly the support the piece received from Bruno Bauer, who had been so vocal in his criticism of Strauss many years earlier.[2] Nietzsche recounts proudly, Bauer "was henceforth one of my most attentive readers."[3] Here Nietzsche presumably refers to the two paragraphs that Bauer dedicates to this work in his *Zur Orientirung über die Bismarck'sche Ära*, where he expresses his appreciation for Nietzsche's critical comments concerning contemporary German culture.[4] Apart from these few examples, there might not seem to be much to work with regarding Nietzsche's relation to the Hegelians. This presumably explains why there has been so little written on this topic.[5]

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1 David Friedrich Strauss, *Der alte und der neue Glaube. Ein Bekenntniß*, Leipzig: S. Hirtzel 1872; David Friedrich Strauss, *The Old Faith and the New*, trans. by Mathilde Blind, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books 1997.

2 Bauer was known for his critical review of Strauss' *Life of Jesus*. Bruno Bauer, "Rezension: *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* von David Friedrich Strauss," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, December 1835, no. 109, pp. 879–880; no. 111, p. 891; no. 113, pp. 905–912. May 1836, no. 86, pp. 681–688; no. 88, pp. 697–704.

3 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vols. 1–15, 2nd ed., ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin and New York: De Gruyter 1988, vol. 6, "Die Unzeitgemässen," § 2, p. 317. (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* in *On the Genealogy of Morals/ Ecce Homo*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Random House 1967, "The Untimely Ones," § 2, p. 278.) See also Nietzsche's letter to Hippolyte Taine, where he writes, "…I have never lacked a few excellent and very devoted readers (they were always old men), among them, for instance, the old Hegelian Bruno Bauer." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. by Christopher Middleton, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1969, p. 268 (letter 153, July 4, 1887).

4 Bruno Bauer, *Zur Orientirung über die Bismarck'sche Ära*, Chemnitz: Ernst Schmeitzner 1880, pp. 287–288.

5 Some exceptions to this neglect include, for example, Elisabeth Heinrich, *Religionskritik in der Neuzeit: Hume, Feuerbach, Nietzsche*, Freiburg and Munich: Karl Alber Verlag 2001; Judith Norman, "Marx, Nietzsche, and the Workshops of History," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2015, pp. 391–407; Michael Roberts, "Rereading Marx and Nietzsche," *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture and Society*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1995, pp. 100–111; Ishay Landa, "The Social Individual and the Last Human: Marx and Nietzsche Agree to Disagree," *Critical Sociology*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2019, pp. 253–265; Christine A. Payne, "The Question of Ideology in Light of Perspectival Knowledge: The Truths of Marx and Nietzsche," *Critical Sociology*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2019, pp. 199–212.

However, in this article I wish to try to show that Nietzsche develops his criticism of religion in large part in dialogue with the Hegelians. Moreover, he has a theory of alienation that is usually associated with figures from the Hegelian school such as Feuerbach and Marx. To be sure, Nietzsche's interpretation of these issues is ultimately different, and I have tried to point out and examine these differences. But despite this, it can be said that he is involved in the same broad tradition of discussion concerning the state of religion and culture in Europe in the nineteenth century. I will base my argument on a close reading of Nietzsche late work *The Anti-Christ*, where I try to indicate the numerous points of contact between his thought and the leading figures of the Hegelian tradition.

1 Nietzsche and Marx: The Revolutionary Goal

1.1 *Nietzsche's Address to his Readers in the Anti-Christ*

The thought of both Nietzsche and Marx is radical and contains a clear revolutionary aim. *The Anti-Christ* can in a sense be regarded as a kind of critical history of the development of the Christian religion.[6] Nietzsche explores its origins in Judaism and its original message with the teachings of Christ. He then tries to show how this message became distorted in the course of the development of the early church. He believes that Christianity has had a profoundly negative effect on Western Civilization, and he traces back to it a host of problems that he sees in the modern Europe of his day. The title of the book might better be translated as *The Anti-Christian* since Nietzsche is interested primarily in a criticism of Christianity as a religion and not in the figure of the Anti-Christ who is referred to in the New Testament.[7]

Nietzsche begins the work with an address to his rightful readers.[8] In the Foreword he indicates that his true readers are few in number and might not even exist yet, with the implication being that his ideas are ahead of their

6 For further reading on this work, see Andreas Urs Sommer, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Der Antichrist. Ein philosophisch-historischer Kommentar*, Basel: Schwabe Verlag 2000, Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997.

7 See 1 John 2:18, 1 John 2:22, 1 John 4:2–3, 2 John 1:7.

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist. Versuch einer Kritik des Christenthums*, in *Nietzsche's Werke*, vols. 1–20, Leipzig: C.G. Naumann 1895–1904, vol. 8, p. 215. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* in *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1968, Foreword, p. 114. (These are the editions of *Der Antichrist* and *The Anti-Christ* that will be used throughout this article.)

time and will only be understood by a later generation. He gives a long list of qualities which the true reader must have: intellectual honesty, the ability to rise above pettiness, strength, courage, a visionary disposition towards new things, and an "unconditional freedom with respect to oneself."[9] He then disdainfully dismisses the rest of his readers, who presumably will not understand him. Despite what might sound like a tone of arrogance and condescension, Nietzsche effectively uses this ploy to gain the sympathy of some of his readers, who flatter themselves with the thought that they belong to the select visionary elite. No one wants to be counted in the other group of people who lack intellectual honesty, strength, courage, etc.

He addresses his readers as the "Hyperboreans,"[10] who in ancient Greek mythology were said to be the people who lived to the north of Greece, beyond the North Wind. They were said to live in a wonderful place, where people enjoyed happiness for a thousand years and where the sun was always shining. Nietzsche speaks in the first-person plural, "we," thus associating himself with his readers as the Hyperboreans. He seems to want to cast himself and his readers in the role of the outsider, who stands in contrast to the modern European. In a sense he again flatters the vanity of his readers by putting them in this group since one of his main goals in the work is to criticize modern European culture. The reader is thus immediately faced with the choice of identifying with Nietzsche's true readers, who understand and agree with him, or with his false readers, whom he criticizes as representatives of a decrepit cultural heritage.

Nietzsche alludes to the legendary happiness of the Hyperboreans, when he writes, "We have discovered happiness, we know the road, we have found the exit out of whole millennia of labyrinth."[11] He thus suggests that he and his readers have discovered the truth and the secret to human fulfillment in contrast to everyone else. The idea seems to be that Western culture has been caught in a nefarious and intractable "labyrinth," that is, has suffered from some as yet undefined, terrible problem, for a very long time, and only now he and his true readers have found the way to escape it. He then briefly contrasts himself and his Hyperborean readers with modern Europeans, implying that it is modern European society which has long stood in the way of human development and fulfillment. Specifically, he suggests that modern society and culture are soft and compromising and thus unable to take the decisive action that is needed. He writes, "It was from *this* modernity that we were ill—from

9 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, p. 216; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, p. 114.
10 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 1, p. 217; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 1, p. 115.
11 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 1, p. 217; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 1, p. 115.

lazy peace, from cowardly compromise, from the whole virtuous uncleanliness of modern Yes and No."[12] By contrast, he and the Hyperborean readers are able to take bold and daring action, and this is the only way to attain true human fulfillment and realize human nature. He writes tersely, "Formula of our happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal*…."[13]

With this initial address to his small, select group of true readers, Nietzsche reveals a conception of a radical philosophy of action that is very much akin to that of Marx. Nietzsche is frustrated with the arid and abstract philosophy that preceded him. The German philosophy that he was raised on is not the solution but rather a part of the larger problem. Just as Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*, addresses the workers of the world and enjoins them to unite in revolutionary action, so also Nietzsche addresses a select, albeit undefined, group of readers, who share with him a revolutionary ideal. In both cases the goal is to overturn the existing state of things, for Marx, in the social-economic sphere and, for Nietzsche, in the cultural-religious one. Although Nietzsche does not outline the means by which his revolution is to take place quite as concretely as Marx does, there can be no doubt that he conceives of his philosophy as being one that calls for immediate action in one's daily practice. Also as with Marx, the key first step in this revolutionary process is becoming aware of the problems and the forms of alienation that are rampant in society. Both Marx and Nietzsche see themselves as raising the awareness of these problems among their contemporaries. They are thus the intellectual leaders or forerunners of the desired revolution.

Later he also refers to himself and his readers as "philosophers."[14] But by this he does not mean to associate himself with the tradition of German philosophy from Kant to Hegel, but rather to distinguish himself from it. Instead, he associates the German philosophers with the forms of modern European culture that he wishes to criticize. Nietzsche sees German philosophy as being the heir of Protestant theology, which has been a part of the problem of the European cultural crisis.[15] He implies that his real readers are the true philosophers who can, with him, see through the errors and deceptions of academic German philosophy. Nietzsche also seems to agree with Engels that the university philosophy of the day is compromised and thus constitutes a part of

12 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 1, p. 217; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 1, p. 115.
13 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 1, p. 218; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 1, p. 115.
14 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 7, p. 223; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 7, p. 119.
15 See Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, §§ 10–12, pp. 225–228; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §§ 10–12, pp. 121–123.

the system of oppression.[16] Also like Engels, he believes that true philosophy is taking place not at the universities or academies, where revolutionaries are unwelcome. Real philosophical thinking and new, inspiring ideas can only be found outside the university.

1.2 *Nietzsche's Understanding of the Key Terms of Morality*

After his initial address to his readers, Nietzsche begins by stating his quite counterintuitive definitions of the key terms of morality. Without any contextualizing or setting up of the issue, he baldly claims, "What is good?—All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad?—All that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness?—The feeling that power *increases*—that a resistance is overcome."[17] These claims might strike the reader as almost incomprehensible in the absence of any further explanation. It seems that Nietzsche is assuming that his readers are familiar with his analysis of the development of moral concepts that he presented earlier in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.[18]

As is well known, in that work Nietzsche argues that moral terms initially had a meaning completely different from how we understand them today. Originally, in a world where only the strong survive, something was called "good" when it was a manifestation of the strong exercising their power. This was in harmony with the natural order of things and human nature, which was endowed with the strength and energy needed for the struggle to survive. This is what Nietzsche refers to as "the will to power," that is, the basic human instinct and drive to exert one's natural powers and realize one's strength. In this world any form of weakness was *bad* since it could handicap one in the effort to secure one's existence. Thus, when one exerted one's strength and overcame some obstacle, this resulted in a feeling of satisfaction and *happiness*. In ancient societies it was thus the powerful nobles or the upper class who defined the terms, designating themselves as "good" and the weaker,

16 Friedrich Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie," *Die neue Zeit: Revue des geistigen und öffentlichen Lebens*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1886, pp. 145–157 (Parts I–II), no. 5, pp. 193–209 (Parts III–IV), p. 209; Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by C.P. Dutt, New York: International Publishers 1941, p. 60.

17 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 2, p. 218; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 2, p. 115.

18 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift*, Leipzig: C.G. Naumann 1887, "Erste Abhandlung," §§ 1–17, pp. 1–37. (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* in *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Random House 1967, "First Essay," §§ 1–17, pp. 25–56.) See Nietzsche's reference to this previous analysis: *Der Antichrist*, § 24, p. 243; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 24, p. 135.

disenfranchised people as "'common,' 'plebian,' 'low,' [which was] finally transformed into the concept 'bad.'"[19]

But Nietzsche claims that this original order of things got turned around in the course of time. The weak people who suffered due to their weakness redefined these key concepts. According to their view, it was wrong for the strong, due to their superior strength, to oppress the weak. Since the weak often suffered at the hands of the strong, the weak turned the concept of good on its head and called the exercise of power not just *bad* but even *evil*.[20] Along the same lines, they then redefined *good* as what was weak and mild, again inverting the original concept. Nietzsche refers to the initial conception of morality where the strong ruled as the "noble morality." The morality of the weak he dubs "slave morality." Historically there have been warrior societies, such as that portrayed in the Homeric poems, where the noble morality was dominant. But over time these societies were replaced by those where the priests dominated, and in which the slave morality was the mainstream since it was only in this way that the priests could gain power from the warriors. Nietzsche identifies the ancient Jewish priests as being responsible for this historical "slave revolt in morality."[21] This revolt was then continued by Christianity.

Hegel referred to the ancient Jewish society as a form of slave morality since the Jews' relation to their God was one of master and slave and not one of free people.[22] But what Hegel and Nietzsche mean by this is quite different. For Hegel, the Jews have not yet developed subjective freedom and have not overcome the asymmetry of the master-slave relation by means of mutual recognition. For Hegel, the goal is a form of equality where one gives the other person the freedom to grant recognition, friendship or love without coercion or compulsion. For Nietzsche, however, this is not a desirable goal. He has nothing but disdain for the idea of equality. Instead, his idea of slave morality is one that develops from a culture where the lower classes and the priests have taken over

19 Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift*, "Erste Abhandlung," § 4, p. 6; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, "First Essay," § 4, p. 28.

20 Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift*, "Erste Abhandlung," § 11, pp. 20f.; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, "First Essay," § 11, p. 40.

21 Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift*, "Erste Abhandlung," § 7, p. 13; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, "First Essay," § 7, p. 34.

22 G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Parts 1–3, ed. by Walter Jaeschke, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1983–85, Part 2, *Die Bestimmte Religion*, vol. 4a, pp. 339–345; G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vols. 1–3, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson, trans. by Robert F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson, and J.M. Stewart with the assistance of H.S. Harris, Berkeley et al.: University of California Press 1984–87, vol. 2, *Determinate Religion*, pp. 441–445.

at the expense of the stronger. Like Hegel, he associates this with Judaism, but his understanding of the Jewish and early Christian inversion of Roman values is a rather different view from that of Hegel.

Nietzsche believes that the shift in moral terms has fundamentally distorted basic human nature, which is all about exercising power in the world. The slave morality calls this evil and thus tries to give a guilty conscience to people who use their natural strength and power. In this way the weak gradually and paradoxically gain power over the strong, and human nature becomes twisted. It is no longer right to exercise power, although this is the way in which humans, along with all other creatures, are made by nature. The slave morality is not motivated by a healthy affirmation of power but by a bitter *ressentiment* at the strength of the stronger people and at one's own weakness.[23]

Nietzsche believes that Christianity has played an important role in developing and canonizing this slave morality in modern European culture. Christianity addresses itself to the weak and the disenfranchised. It teaches that the meek will in fact be the stronger in the kingdom of heaven. This was a natural development, according to Nietzsche, from the historical situation in which the Jews were oppressed by the Romans. Although they were politically weak and constantly vulnerable to the exercise of power by the Romans, they found a way to turn their hopeless political situation around and to regard themselves as stronger. This was the birth of Christianity. Nietzsche believes that this has played a pernicious role in the development of Western history, where this principle was adopted and in time penetrated to all aspects of society and culture.

2 Nietzsche and Marx: Alienation

2.1 *Slave Morality as a Form of Alienation*

Nietzsche and Marx share a certain conception of alienation. Nietzsche declares that the question he wishes to raise is about what kind of people we should be or in his words, "what type of human being one ought to breed, ought to will."[24] He implicitly claims that we should go back to the noble morality since the domination of the slave morality for such a long time has done untold harm to human beings. He argues that the modern notion of progress is an illusion.[25] Humans have not developed or made progress historically.

23 See Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 24, pp. 243f.; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 24, p. 135.

24 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 3, p. 218; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 3, p. 116.

25 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 4, p. 219; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 4, p. 116.

On the contrary, the rise to domination of the slave morality can be regarded as a kind of devolution. Nietzsche claims that historically there have occasionally appeared what he calls "a higher type" or an *Übermensch* in contrast to the mainstream, but these have been historical accidents and not the result of any conscious planning or decision.[26] The question is what sort of people we want our societies and educational systems to produce. Here again one can hear an echo of Marx's revolutionary plea: something needs to be done to reform the current state of things in order to produce a higher kind of human being that is more in harmony with our true human nature.

Nietzsche argues that Christianity represents a value system that is just the opposite of the purportedly natural one that he is advocating: "Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it had made an ideal out of *opposition* to the preservative instincts of strong life."[27] He claims that Christianity has rendered the human being a "sick animal,"[28] and he regularly uses metaphors of sickness and health to underscore his point that, in his view, the exercise of power is natural and healthy, while the repression of it is unnatural and leads to sickness.

There is an interesting contrast on this point with the thought of Kierkegaard. In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard describes the state of being a nonbeliever as one of despair since one lives constantly in uncertainty and fear of death. He refers to this despair with the biblical phrase "the sickness unto death." The only cure for this terrible condition, he argues, is to accept Christianity. For Kierkegaard, Christianity is the solution to human alienation and Christian faith, the cure to the sickness of despair. For Nietzsche, this situation is exactly the opposite. Christianity is what renders people sick. Moreover, "*making* sick is the true hidden objective of the Church's whole system of salvation procedures."[29] Christianity represents what is contrary to the natural order of things, to people's natural instincts. It thus leads to a distortion of human nature. Christianity is the cause of human alienation. Here one can see a radically different evaluation of the value and truth of Christianity from that found in Christianity.

Nietzsche describes modern human beings as suffering from depravity and *décadence*, which he defines as follows: "I call an animal, a species, an

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26 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 4, p. 219; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 4, p. 116.

27 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 5, p. 220; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 5, p. 117.

28 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 3, p. 219; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 3, p. 116.

29 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 51, p. 287; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 51, p. 167. Far from being the cure, Christian faith "*has* to be a form of sickness" (Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 52, p. 290; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 52, p. 169).

individual depraved when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it *prefers* what is harmful to it.…I consider life itself instinct for growth, for continuance, for accumulation of forces, for power: where the will to power is lacking there is decline."[30] So when a strong, powerful person decides not to use his power since he would have a guilty conscience for doing so, even though it is in his interest to use it, this is a form of depravity. *Décadence* is the decay or diminishing of natural powers. This means that the individual is no longer in touch with his natural instincts. Nietzsche even refers to this as nihilism or something that denies life.

Here it is clear that Nietzsche has a theory of alienation, even though the term itself does not play a central role here.[31] What he describes as depravity and *décadence* can be understood as forms of alienation. He clearly believes that humans have become alienated from their true nature as creatures endowed with natural powers, which are intended to be used in the world. Humans can no longer immediately feel their natural instinct toward power. In our modern world we are prevented from doing so by morality and law, and so we are alienated from ourselves. There is a part of ourselves that can never be actualized or fulfilled in modern society, and thus we are alienated from it. Nietzsche takes this to be the key to the *sickness* of modern Europe. The great spirits are oppressed not by the strong but by the weak, with the result that no one can gain the satisfaction of exercising and fulfilling their natural desires.

Nietzsche claims that the concept of pity is central to the Christian moral view.[32] He then gives an uncompromising criticism of the concept, which again brings out the radicality of his position. He offers two arguments. First, the main issue is human suffering, and one should not lose sight of this. When one who suffers is pitied, this often can make the suffering even worse, and thus pity is a dangerous sentiment. Here one might think of the story of Oedipus. It was prophesied that by the oracle that any son born to Laius would kill him when he grew up. So Laius and his wife Jocasta gave their infant child, Oedipus, to a servant and tasked him with exposing the child on a mountain in order to avert this fate. The servant took the child away but at the decisive moment did not have the heart to carry out the order and kill the child by exposure. As he

30 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 6, pp. 220f.; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 6, p. 117.

31 It should be noted that Nietzsche does in fact use the term "self-alienation" (*Selbst-Entfremdung*) in this text. See Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 54, p. 294; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 54, p. 172. See also Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 58, p. 305; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 58, p. 181.

32 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 7, p. 221; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 7, p. 118. See also Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift*, "Vorrede," § 6, pp. x–xi; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Preface, § 6, p. 20.

says explicitly, he was motivated by pity.[33] So he gave the child to a shepherd from Corinth, and eventually the child was adopted by the King and Queen of Corinth who raised it, unaware of anything about its past. As a result, since Oedipus lived, he grew up and inadvertently killed his father and married his mother, causing even greater suffering than if he had simply died as a child. So for the Greeks and for Nietzsche, the moral to the story is that pity causes or increases suffering. Second, it is a principle of evolution that only the fittest survive. By employing the principle of pity to help the weak, one is in a sense intervening in this natural process. Pity thus "preserves what is ripe for destruction; it defends life's disinherited and condemned."[34] Nature has condemned the weak to die, and on Nietzsche's view it is best to let it run its natural course.

He returns to his medical metaphor and writes, "Nothing in our unhealthy modernity is more unhealthy than Christian pity. To be physician *here*, to be inexorable *here*, to wield the knife *here*—that pertains to us, that is our kind of philanthropy, with that are *we* philosophers, we Hyperboreans!"[35] So a part of the proposed cure for the sick modern age is to eliminate the concept of pity, and Nietzsche enjoins his readers directly to play the role of the doctor and to follow him in this. This passage refers to his earlier claim, "The weak and ill-constituted shall perish: first principle of *our* philanthropy. And one shall help them to do so."[36] To our modern ears this sounds frighteningly like an echo of the rhetoric that caused the Holocaust, namely, the idea that there are certain weak people who are the cause of the ills of society and who do not have the right to live. It would of course be a mistake to make Nietzsche responsible for the Holocaust, the abuses of the Nazis, or even anti-Semitism, but it is nonetheless important to emphasize this aspect of his thought if we are to appreciate it in its full radicality. What he is saying is shocking and disturbing to our normal moral intuitions, and it is supposed to be.

2.2 *Nietzsche's Philosophical Anthropology*

Nietzsche has a materialist view of human beings that is clearly influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution. He notes that while past ages had conceived of humans as having a divine origin, now in his own age humans have been placed "back among the animals."[37] We are like animals with natural drives

33 See Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. by David Grene, in *Sophocles 1*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1954, p. 63, lines 1179ff.

34 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 7, p. 221; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 7, p. 118.

35 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 7, p. 223; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 7, p. 119.

36 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 2, p. 218; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 2, p. 116.

37 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 14, p. 229; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 14, p. 124.

and impulses. The notion of humans as somehow higher is an illusion. On the contrary, of all the animals it is only humans who have become alienated from their own instincts and their own nature. Thus, "man is…the most unsuccessful animal, the sickliest."[38] But even evolutionary theory carries with it the prejudice that humans are the pinnacle of evolutionary development. Nietzsche objects to this and rejects it as simply human vanity: "Man is absolutely not the crown of creation: every creature stands beside him at the same stage of perfection."[39] The survival of the fittest and the strongest is the principle of nature, and by the very fact that they still exist, all animals are the result of a natural process that has weeded out the less fit. All animals in a sense thus stand on a par as survivors of natural selection.

Nietzsche's theory can be seen as an interesting contrast to that of Hegel. In Hegel's analysis of the Fall from Genesis, he believed that the interpretation given to the story in the Old Testament was mistaken.[40] The Fall is not a sad event to be lamented since this implies that humans are intended to remain in a state of nature and to be like the animals. Instead, the true nature of human beings is to progress beyond this and to develop self-consciousness and everything that comes with it. For Hegel, it is this higher faculty that humans share with God. For Hegel, to be truly human means not just acting immediately on one's natural desires. Instead, to be human means to recognize these desires and to mediate them by means of our rationality. By contrast, Nietzsche seems to claim that humans are only in harmony with their true nature when they exercise their natural faculty of strength and power, that is, when they are like the animals. Nietzsche seems to regard this as the highest faculty and not self-consciousness or reason. Here one can see two completely opposed conceptions of human nature.

Nietzsche uses Hegel's language of "consciousness" and "spirit" and explicitly rejects this view: "Formerly one saw in man's consciousness, in his 'spirit,' the proof of his higher origin, his divinity."[41] This view attempts to isolate the rational element of human beings and abstract from the physical side. Hegel claimed that it is consciousness and spirit that we share with God, and thus this is the highest faculty that separates us from the animals. It is what makes science, ethics, and conceptual thinking possible. We should therefore focus on and try to cultivate this highest faculty and not the lower ones. Nietzsche

38 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 14, p. 229; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 14, p. 124.
39 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 14, p. 229; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 14, p. 124.
40 Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Part 2, vol. 4a, pp. 338n–343n; Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, *Determinate Religion*, pp. 438n–442n.
41 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 14, p. 230; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 14, p. 124.

rejects this view: "becoming-conscious, 'spirit,' is to us precisely a symptom of a relative imperfection of the organism…'Pure spirit,' is pure stupidity."[42] Here again Nietzsche's view is just the opposite of Hegel's. Self-conscious reason is not that which makes us higher but rather that which leads to our corruption since it is what alienates us from our natural instincts and will to power.

Marx is also relevant for this comparison since he too explicitly emphasizes humans as physical beings and as a part of nature: "Man is directly a *natural being*."[43] This is, of course, intended to be in opposition to Hegel's understanding of humans as spirit. Similarly, Nietzsche violently criticizes what he takes to be Christianity's attack on the human body and on our physical existence in the world. Moreover, Marx has what he regards as a materialist conception of the human being as a natural creature with creative natural abilities and impulses to work and produce, but these abilities have been distorted by modern society and specifically the capitalist economic system. Thus, Marx's conception of the human being's natural abilities has some resonances with Nietzsche's understanding of the will to power. Likewise, Marx's diagnosis of our alienation from these natural abilities in modern society runs parallel Nietzsche's understanding of how the will to power is repressed by a poisoned ethics and value system that has been created by Christianity. To this extent, Marx would seem to be close to Nietzsche's position.

But then, by contrast, when one recalls what Marx wrote in the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," it seems that he is in the end closer to Hegel. In his analysis of the third form of alienated labor, Marx spells out his philosophical anthropology and argues, following Hegel, that there is a fundamental split between animals and human beings. Specifically, humans have self-consciousness and can regard their "life-activity" with reason and reflection.[44] By contrast, animals simply act immediately on instinct to obtain what they need to survive. But, for Marx, human self-consciousness is what makes human labor of a higher kind. Humans freely work and create because it is a

42 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 14, p. 230; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 14, p. 125.

43 Karl Marx, "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844," in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, vols. 1–46, ed. by the Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, Berlin: Dietz 1956–2018, vol. 40, p. 578; Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker, New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company 1978, p. 115.

44 Marx, "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844," vol. 40, p. 517; Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," p. 76.

part of their nature, whereas animals do so only in order to fulfill a natural need. Thus, while humans are natural beings, there is more to it than that.[45]

The contrast between the different views is carried over into the varying conceptions of freedom. For Nietzsche, true freedom is the exercise of one's natural power, unhindered by the scruples of conscience or slave morality. According to this view, the strong are freer than the weak since they have more power and more opportunity to exercise it. This is, so to speak, an aristocratic view since it presupposes the natural differences between people and enforces them as a part of the natural order of things. For Nietzsche, any interference in this amounts to an undermining of that natural order.

For Hegel, by contrast, true freedom is not just for a select group, but for everyone. As we have seen in his analysis of the lord and the bondsman, freedom is not something that we can have as isolated individuals. True freedom is something that is shared among free individuals. For one person to be free, he or she must be recognized by another person as such, and that recognition must be given freely. Any force or compulsion undermines the freedom not just of the one who is forced but also of the one receiving that person's forced recognition. Thus, for Hegel, Nietzsche's understanding of a noble morality, where the strong rule the weak, will always undermine true freedom since there will always be masters and slaves on this view.

Similarly, for Marx, true freedom can only appear in a classless society, that is, when the social inequalities are eliminated. But, for Nietzsche, it is the elimination of the natural differences between people that has led to the problems. He has nothing but disdain for any form of socialism and talk of equality.[46] It is uncertain if Nietzsche ever read Marx himself, but there can be no doubt that he was aware of the growing socialist movements that Marx and Engels were associated with. In reference to this, Nietzsche writes,

> Whom among today's rabble do I hate the most? The Socialist rabble, the Chandala apostles who undermine the worker's instinct, his pleasure, his feeling of contentment with his little state of being—who make him envious, who teach him revengefulness….Injustice never lies in unequal rights, it lies in the claim to "*equal*" rights.[47]

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45 Marx, "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844," vol. 40, p. 579; Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," p. 116: "But man is not merely a natural being: he is a *human* natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself."

46 See Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 43, p. 272, see also § 46, p. 280; § 57, pp. 299–304; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 43, pp. 156f., see also § 46, p. 162; § 57, pp. 176–179.

47 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 57, pp. 303f.; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 57, p. 179.

For Nietzsche, people like Marx are in fact not helping the workers but rather hurting them by adding to their sense of dissatisfaction with their situation. The working class are who they are by nature. They are naturally weak and have the station in society that is fitting for the weak. The intelligent worker understands this and is satisfied with it. But, for Nietzsche, the socialists simply indoctrinate the workers into the idea that they are worthy of something better and make them resentful of the bourgeoisie. They thus develop a slave morality full of bitterness and resentment. While Marx believes that the revolution of the proletariat is the way to overcome the various forms of alienation, for Nietzsche this kind of thinking is itself a symptom of alienation from our natural being. Here it is clear that Marx and Nietzsche have a radically different understanding of the causes of alienation and the solution to it.

One can find another point of contrast in their views of social life. For Nietzsche, the "higher type" of human being or *Übermensch* is by nature a loner. The free and spontaneous exercise of power of such a person vis-à-vis weaker persons, seems to undermine any sense of community or cooperation. Any attempt to compromise would mean repressing one's will to power for the sake of something else. One would think that this would lead to a form of alienation from the other, and it might be argued that Nietzsche's attempt to overcome alienation fails since it simply replaces one form of alienation with another; specifically, instead of being alienated from our basic human nature, we will be alienated from other people as each individual strives to assert his or her own will to power, indifferent to the well-being of others.

By contrast, for Hegel, humans are by nature social beings. To be fully human we must see ourselves in the eyes of others and enjoy their recognition. Hegel's conception of personhood in the Christian view means giving up a part of oneself in a relationship of friendship or love, and thereby gaining oneself anew at a higher level. One finds oneself at home in the other person. All social life is based on this principle that people agree to give up a part of themselves in order to be a part of society and reap its benefits. This would not be possible if one categorically insisted on one's absolute freedom to exercise one's natural power at any time. Here Marx also comes down closer to Hegel's position than to Nietzsche's. For Marx, the social element is essential to human nature. Only by the cooperative work of the proletariat can they achieve their goal of revolution. They are at times called upon to put aside their personal interests and show a sense of solidarity for the movement as a whole. For Nietzsche, however, this kind of thing would undermine the individualism of the higher type of human being and the free expression of the will to power. Here again we have radically different conceptions of human social life.

3 Nietzsche and Feuerbach: The Conception of God and the Future

3.1 *The Development of the Conception of God*

There are also a number of striking points of comparison that can be made between Nietzsche and Feuerbach; one of these concerns the origin of the nature of God. Nietzsche follows Feuerbach's understanding of God as a projection of the qualities of a given people. Nietzsche traces briefly the different conceptions of the divine in order to show the crucial shift that took place with Christianity. Initially the gods were national deities. He explains, "A people which still believes in itself still also has its own God. In him it venerates the conditions through which it has prospered, its virtues—it projects its joy in itself, its feeling of power on to a being whom one can thank for them."[48] This conception of a deity is in harmony with the natural development and exercise of power of a people. At this stage, religion is primarily about giving thanks to the divine for one's existence and prosperity.

According to this initial conception, the gods were conceived as both good and bad. A god could help one in need but could also be violent and vengeful. The Romans had gods of this sort such as Febris. This goddess had the power over fever, that is, she was the one whom people prayed to when they were afflicted by fever. She was thus good since she was responsible for stopping fever, but she was also bad since she was the cause of it. Similarly, the god Robigus was celebrated at the agricultural festival of the Robigalia for protecting the crops against disease. But at the same time this god was also the cause of this affliction of the crops.

Nietzsche claims that this conception of the divine changed with Christianity, which arose in the context of the Jewish religion when the Jews were living in a state of oppression. He writes, "when a people is perishing; when it feels its faith in the future, its hope of freedom vanish completely; when it becomes conscious that the most profitable thing of all is submissiveness and that the virtues of submissiveness are a condition of its survival, then its God *has* to alter too."[49] In this state of oppression it no longer makes sense to worship a god who stands for national virtues and victories. Now the new God of Christianity reflects a worldview of an oppressed people: "He now becomes a dissembler, timid, modest, counsels 'peace of soul,' no more hatred, forbearance, 'love' even towards friend and foe."[50] These are the values that an oppressed people hopes to disseminate. This God ceases to be a mere national God of Judaism

48 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 16, p. 232; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 16, p. 126.
49 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 16, pp. 232f.; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 16, p. 126.
50 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 16, p. 233; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 16, p. 126.

and becomes a God for everyone, that is, even the oppressors. It is better for the oppressed if the oppressors, that is, the Romans, adopt a worldview of love, forgiveness, etc., since this would obviously improve the lot of the oppressed. This means that the new God now becomes just a God of good and loses the former quality of being both good and bad. Nietzsche believes that the earlier national gods were a natural and legitimate expression of the will to power. By contrast, the Christian God is the opposite, the oppression of power.

The Christian God then becomes a God for all those people who are weak, downtrodden and suffer oppression. But again, they invert the usual use of the terms and call themselves "good" instead of weak.[51] By contrast, the Roman oppressors, who were originally regarded as strong, are reinterpreted as being "evil." Likewise, the Christian God is the good God, while the Roman gods are reconceived as devils or demons, in short, as evil.[52] In this way an entire value system is turned on its head, and, for Nietzsche, the natural order of things is distorted.

Nietzsche believes that the Christian view of the world arises from a people who is oppressed. Since they suffer in this world, they create the illusion of another world, where things will be better. There those who oppress others will suffer, and those who are oppressed will be free and happy. This view is based on a hatred of the actual situation in the world and thus creates a series of fictions to make that situation more bearable. This view "falsifies, disvalues and denies actuality."[53] A part of this can be seen in the Christian concept of hope and a promise of a better life to come: "Sufferers have to be sustained by a hope which cannot be refuted by any actuality—which is not *done away with* by any fulfillment: a hope in the Beyond."[54] The principle of hope is an effective denial of the ultimate truth and validity of actuality and the real world. It is for this reason that Nietzsche refers to Christianity as a form of nihilism. It denies the true situation of the world, of actuality. It oppresses the natural drives and instincts that natural creatures have in the world.[55]

Nietzsche thus thinks that it is absurd to think of the shift from the god of Judaism to the God of Christianity as an advance in the historical development.[56] On the contrary, this is an example of devolution or a move away from

51 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 17, p. 233; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 17, p. 127.
52 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 17, p. 233; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 17, p. 127.
53 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 15, p. 231; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 15, p. 125.
54 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 23, p. 241; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 23, p. 133.
55 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 23, pp. 241f.; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 23, p. 134.
56 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 17, pp. 233f.; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 17, p. 127.

the development of humanity.[57] This became even worse when Christianity spread through the centuries to become the religion of all of Europe. The result is what Nietzsche takes to be the sick modern European culture.

3.2 *The Distortion of Christ's Message*

Nietzsche argues that Christ's original message was changed and distorted after his death by his disciples. The fact and manner of his death raised uncomfortable questions for his followers. They felt "shaken and disappointed to their depths," and they could not avoid the "suspicion that such a death might be the refutation of their cause."[58] So they were obliged to reconceive Christ's teachings in such a way that they could make sense of this event and empower themselves in the changed situation. The first step was to understand Christ to be militating against the ruling class in Jewish society, as "*in mutiny against the social order*."[59] But Christ himself preached a message of love and bore with patience the punishments and humiliation that were inflicted on him. This pacific disposition changes entirely with the apostles, who turn the message into one of vengeance and *ressentiment*.

Nietzsche then identifies the key to this new message as a hatred for all concrete reality. It was a radical revolt against the Jewish priests and the Roman oppressors.[60] The early Christians showed an "antipathy towards…every spatial and temporal concept, towards everything firm, all that is custom, institution, Church," and by contrast taught a "flight into the 'ungraspable,' into the 'inconceivable'" in contrast to the real world.[61] The disciples thus waged war on actuality.

Similarly, Christ taught a doctrine of love and forgiveness. If one is beaten, one should offer no resistance, that is, one should turn the other cheek. For Nietzsche, this is a natural consequence of a view of a people which has lived in a hopeless situation of oppression for years and which has grown tired of fruitless attempts at rebellion.[62] One should no longer resist but simply accept and even love one's enemy. Jesus embodied this teaching right up to his death. By contrast, the disciples taught that there would be a judgment and a retribution for those who have sinned.

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57 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, §§ 17–18, pp. 233–235; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §§ 17–18, pp. 127–128.

58 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 40, p. 267; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 40, p. 152.

59 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 40, p. 267; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 40, p. 152.

60 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 27, p. 249; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 27, p. 139.

61 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 29, p. 253; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 29, p. 141.

62 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 30, p. 253; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 30, p. 142.

According to Nietzsche, the disciples had to invent some kind of story to explain why God had allowed Christ to be executed on the cross. They came up with the idea that "God gave his Son for the forgiveness of sins, as a *sacrifice*,"[63] although this was never anything that Christ mentioned in his teachings. According to Nietzsche, Christ's message was that sin was no longer an issue: "For Jesus had done away with the concept 'guilt' itself—he had denied any chasm between God and man, he *lived* this unity of God and man as *his* 'glad tidings.'"[64] Given this, the idea that Christ was supposed to be a sacrifice for sins made no sense at all.

Moreover, Christ's teachings are a practice and not a theological or philosophical doctrine. It was a "new way of living, *not* a new belief."[65] He never claimed that his teachings were a doctrine that could be proven with reasoned arguments.[66] After the Church established itself, it had a vested interest in developing a fixed doctrine. Thus, Christianity, as an organized and institutionalized religion, gradually developed into something very different from Christ's own views: "one constructed the *Church* out of the antithesis to the Gospel."[67] The Christian Church therefore gradually distorted the teachings of Christ and turned them into something very different and even diametrically opposed to Christ's original intention and spirit. Christ's followers turned him into a kind of priest in order to support their own views. They thus "created their 'God' according to their requirements" and added certain doctrines such as the Last Judgment, which Christ himself never taught.[68]

Here Nietzsche can be seen as following in the footsteps of Feuerbach's theory of projection, according to which the conception of a people's God is simply a projection of the human mind. But there is more to Nietzsche's theory of how the conception of God arises and is shaped in Judaism and Christianity. For Nietzsche, this conception has been manipulated by the priests, who then, in order to enhance their own power, presented it to the gullible people. Nietzsche especially singles out Paul for criticism as one who "invented [a conception] of God for himself."[69] As a result, the priests have produced an idea of God that Nietzsche finds highly problematic: "What sets us apart is not that we recognize no God, either in history or in nature or behind nature—but

63 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 41, p. 269; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 41, p. 154.
64 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 41, p. 269; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 41, p. 154.
65 See Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 33, p. 259; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 33, p. 146. See also Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 35, p. 261; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 35, p. 147.
66 See Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 32, p. 256; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 32, p. 144.
67 See Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 36, p. 261; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 36, p. 148.
68 See Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 31, p. 255; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 31, p. 143.
69 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 47, p. 282; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 47, p. 163.

that we find that which has been reverenced as God not 'godlike' but pitiable, absurd, harmful, not merely an error but a *crime against life*."[70] This stands in stark contrast to Feuerbach's view. For Feuerbach, it was the highest human qualities that were projected onto the divine. Humans love, and so they conceive of God as a loving entity; humans have knowledge, and so they conceive of God as an all-knowing entity. These are positive qualities. But, for Nietzsche, the resentful and sick priests have created a conception of God from negative human qualities. Nietzsche is thus much more critical and even cynical about the mechanism by which the conception of God has arisen and flourished.

Nietzsche claims that the distorted doctrines of the Church have led to the sad state of humanity in his day. The Church devalues "nature and natural values."[71] The priests are dangerous parasites or poisonous spiders, harmful to human life. They have produced a "state of human self-violation,"[72] by which humans are alienated from their own nature. Nietzsche thus lays at the doorstep of Christianity the ills of the modern world.

3.3 *The Doctrine of Immortality and Christianity's Persecution of Science*

Nietzsche finds the Christian doctrine of immortality particularly troublesome. Again, he thinks that this marks a distortion of Christ's original teachings. For Christ, the Kingdom of God is not something in the beyond but a way of life in this world. By contrast, for the disciples, the Kingdom of God was intended as a contrast to the real world. But the good news that Christ himself taught was just the opposite, namely, "the existence, the fulfillment, the actuality of this 'kingdom.'"[73] The disciples introduced the concept of personal immortality and judgment after death, which distorted Christ's actual teachings. While the focus for Christ was on this world, the focus of his disciples was on another world.

Nietzsche believes that this doctrine radically changes the terms of life to the detriment of what is natural. It encourages one to believe that life in this world is not real or important since the real life is to come only after death: "So to live that there is no longer any meaning in living: that now becomes the 'meaning' of life."[74] This is a part of the nihilism of Christianity, according to Nietzsche. It devalues everything in this world for the sake of an illusory afterlife. If this life

70 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 47, p. 281; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 47, pp. 162f.
71 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 38, p. 264; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 38, p. 150.
72 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 38, p. 264; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 38, p. 150.
73 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 40, p. 268; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 40, p. 153.
74 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 43, p. 272; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 43, p. 156.

is only a precursor for the real life that comes after death, then there is no point in developing one's physical or mental abilities in the here and now. There is no point in working to create something new or important in this world since it is deprived of any ultimate value. On this point Nietzsche can be seen as following in the footsteps of Bruno Bauer's criticism in *Christianity Exposed: A Recollection of the Eighteenth Century and a Contribution to the Crisis of the Nineteenth Century*.[75]

Nietzsche believes that this doctrine of an afterlife was formulated by the early Christians as a form of revenge against their oppressors and as an expression of the resentment that they felt for their own lowly positions. While they are oppressed in this life, they believed that they would be rich and powerful in the next one, and their oppressors would be harshly judged and suffer punishment. For Nietzsche, this doctrine evidences an enormous arrogance and egoism since it elevates the individual to an unrealistically high position. Believers in this doctrine "imagine that for their sakes the laws of nature are continually being *broken*."[76] In contrast to everything else in nature, they pretend to be immune from death. This is a kind of "flattery of personal vanity" that appeals to certain people and makes the Christian doctrine attractive.[77]

Nietzsche also believes that the doctrine of immortality brought with it the idea that we are all equal before God. This doctrine effectively levels all people to a common mean. It does away with all forms of hierarchy and nobility. He believes that this is a crime against the natural order of things, where there are natural differences between people, which should be respected. Great and talented people are brought down by this leveling, and their contributions to humanity are thus undermined, not because they have done something wrong, but because they are great and talented. As we have seen in connection with

75 Bruno Bauer, *Das entdeckte Christenthum. Eine Erinnerung an das 18. Jahrhundert und ein Beitrag zur Krisis des 19.*, Zürich and Winterthur: Verlag des literarischen Comptoirs 1843. English translation: *An English Edition of Bruno Bauer's 1843 Christianity Exposed: A Recollection of the Eighteenth Century and a Contribution to the Crisis of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Paul Trejo, trans. by Esther Ziegler and Jutta Hamm, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press 2002 (*Studies in German Thought and History*, vol. 23). See Jon Stewart, *Hegel's Century: Alienation and Recognition in a Time of Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2021, pp. 118–140. It should be noted that scholars have pointed out this connection before. See Ernst Benz, "Nietzsche und Bruno Bauer," in his *Nietzsches Ideen zur Geschichte des Christentums und der Kirche*, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1956, pp. 104–121. See also Ernst Barnikol (ed.), "Einleitung. Bruno Bauer als Kritiker des Urchristentums," in *Das entdeckte Christentum im Vormärz. Bruno Bauers Kampf gegen Religion und Christentum und Erstausgabe seiner Kampfschrift*, Jena: Eugen Diederichs 1927, p. 78.

76 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 43, p. 272; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 43, p. 156.

77 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 43, p. 272; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 43, p. 156.

the comparison with Marx, Nietzsche is highly critical of the movements of democracy and socialism in his own time: "let us not underestimate the fatality that has crept out of Christianity even into politics! No one any longer possesses today the courage to claim special privileges or the right to rule."[78] He finds the idea of "equal rights for all" to be the height of absurdity.[79] The idea that our immortal souls are equal in the beyond has undermined the idea of real differences in the real world. This is a doctrine that allows the base and lowly to join forces and oppress the great and noble.

Nietzsche argues that the Christian priests have actively persecuted all forms of science and learning since this represented a threat to their power. He gives an interpretation of parts of Genesis in order to demonstrate this.[80] He points out that Genesis is a book written by priests, and so it reflects their fears and concerns. At the beginning of Genesis there is the story of the Fall, where Adam and Eve are seduced by the serpent into eating from the tree of knowledge. The discovery of knowledge, that is, science is thus portrayed as the first and original sin. For Bakunin, the story of the Fall represents the fundamental human need to rebel in order to be free.[81] But, for Nietzsche, the story simply represents a deeper struggle of religion with knowledge and science. For Hegel, the primary issue of the story is the coming to self-consciousness of human beings, who for the first time separated themselves from nature. For Hegel, when it says that the humans have become like God, this means that they have attained self-conscious spirit.[82] Nietzsche, however, interprets this in terms of a rivalry with respect to knowledge: "God had created for himself a rival, science makes *equal to God*," and this is very dangerous since "it is all over with priests and gods if man becomes scientific."[83] So what is at issue is not that there is something that is dangerous in itself about knowledge for man, for example, that he might create something that might be harmful to himself, but rather that any form of new knowledge represents a threat to the power of

78 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 43, p. 273; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 43, p. 156.

79 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 43, p. 272; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 43, p. 156.

80 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 48, pp. 282–284; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 48, pp. 163–165.

81 See Mikhail Bakunin, *Dieu et l'État* [no place of publication given]: L'Altiplano 2008, pp. 17–21; Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State*, ed. by Paul Avrich, New York: Dover 1970, pp. 10–12. See Jon Stewart, *Hegel's Century: Alienation and Recognition in a Time of Revolution*, pp. 223–235.

82 Genesis 3:22. See Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Part 2, *Die Bestimmte Religion*, vol. 4a, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*, p. 338n; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, *Determinate Religion*, p. 439n.

83 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 48, p. 283; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 48, p. 164.

the priests. So the story of the Fall is one about how knowledge and science are forbidden for human beings.

But how can one prevent people from learning new things? Freedom and leisure are the presupposition for science and invention, and so the point of the punishments that God inflicts on human beings after the original sin is that they will no longer have any free time. Man must work for a living. Women will be vexed by the dangers of childbirth. Both will be preoccupied with death. Their thoughts are thus kept busy with other things, and they are prevented from having the time and energy required to explore the world around them in a scientific manner.

Soon after the story of the Fall, the account of the Tower of Babel appears.[84] For Nietzsche, this story is a part of the same narrative about the condemnation of science. The tower represents a great human scientific achievement: a wonderful work of architecture that constitutes a threat to God. With this, so to speak, second Fall, God punishes the human race by giving them different languages so that they can no longer communicate with one another. Like science, the great Tower of Babel is a large collective project that involves the work of many different people. If these people can no longer communicate effectively, then they will no longer be able to make such things. According to Nietzsche, the point of God's punishment is again to undermine the ability of human beings to do science. Since science is a threat to the priests, they portray it as being the reason for God's wrath. Nietzsche's interpretation of the punishment of the builders of the Tower of Babel goes even further since he claims that God created war among the people, which could be understood as an extension of having different languages, which leads to conflicts.

According to Nietzsche, the concept of sin was introduced by the priests to prevent the development of science.[85] When people were convinced that they were sinful and were vexed by their own sense of guilt, their focus was directed to this set of issues concerning their own inner moral life and not towards exploring the outside world. Moreover, by feeling a constant sense of guilt and sinfulness, the people were made dependent on the priests, to whom they had to come with sacrifices. The concept of sin was thus a way in which the priests enhanced their own status and power in the community and made people dependent on them. Nietzsche declares that the introduction of sin and its related concepts was "*the greatest crime against humanity*."[86] Moreover,

84 Genesis 11:1–9.

85 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 49, pp. 284–285; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 49, pp. 165–166.

86 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 49, p. 285; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 49, p. 165.

sin is also a form of self-alienation or "self-violation" (*Selbstschändung*) since it makes one feel guilty about the exercise of one's natural powers.[87]

3.4 *Belief as a Form of Self-Alienation*

Nietzsche argues that skepticism, and not dogmatic conviction, is a position that is characteristic of great intellects. His claim is that it takes much more intellectual strength to live with a situation of ambiguity and uncertainty than to adopt some view and stubbornly cling to it. The latter, he says, is typical of weak people who cannot bear to live in uncertainty. Thus, he argues, "Freedom from convictions of any kind, the *capacity* for an unconstrained view, *pertains* to strength….Conversely, the need for belief, for some unconditional Yes and No…is a requirement of weakness."[88]

He claims that when one holds a conviction or believes in something, one in a sense defers to a higher power. One refuses to accept for oneself the truth of the issue but instead ascribes it to someone else. For this reason, Nietzsche claims that the "man of faith, the 'believer' of every sort is necessarily a dependent man—such as cannot out of himself posit ends at all. The 'believer' does not belong to *himself*, he can be only a means, he has to be *used*, he needs someone who will use him."[89] Nietzsche thus describes belief in any form as a kind of self-alienation.[90] The individual is alienated from his own views and accepts the authority of others. When we believe, we say that there is something else that is true, and we are made a slave to it. By contrast, with skepticism one remains authentic and owns that there is no definitive answer to certain issues, regardless of how uncomfortable that might make one.

The person with convictions is not able to evaluate anything neutrally, but everything is interpreted in terms of his convictions. Things are made true and false based on this pre-established standard. By contrast, the truthful person or the person for whom truth is important does not prejudice the issue ahead of time with convictions and intellectual investments. One seeks the truth for its own sake and does not force conclusions unless they are clearly warranted by the evidence. The man of convictions can never be truthful since he is always an ideologue, trying to confirm his convictions. He does not have his own conscience that he can set up in opposition to the convictions that he claims to have. He is thus alienated from his own conscience. By contrast, the skeptic is always true to his conscience and sets no higher authority up against it.

87 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 49, p. 285; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 49, p. 166.
88 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 54, p. 294; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 54, p. 172.
89 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 54, p. 294; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 54, p. 172.
90 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 54, p. 294; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 54, p. 172.

Nietzsche goes on to argue that there is no essential difference between a conviction and a lie.[91] When we lie, he says, we do not want to recognize something that we in fact see to be the case and thus stick to our stated conviction. Even in the face of contradictory evidence, one maintains one's conviction. The man of conviction is like a politician, an ideologue, or a "party man,"[92] who defends a specific position for the sake of appearances, even though he knows full well that this is contradicted by clear evidence. Nietzsche points out the absurdity in the fact that respect is accorded to people with strong convictions. Such people are simply liars, and their views are not made more true or respectable by the fact that they tell lies out of loyalty to a specific cause or political party. Priests, according to Nietzsche, are likewise liars, and they defend their views by saying that they are given by God or in accordance with God's will.

4 Nietzsche's Conclusion

Nietzsche ends *The Anti-Christ* was a bitter description of the way in which he believes Christianity destroyed the great culture of the ancient world and indeed human progress in general.[93] The Christians undermined the positive, life-affirming instincts of the Greeks and Romans and introduced a new, perverted value system. He holds Christianity responsible for the fall of Rome and compares the Christian to the anarchist in that "their instinct is set only on destruction."[94] Christianity is conceived as a form of nihilism in contrast to the positive values of the Greco-Roman world. In short, wherever there was culture and scientific progress, it was cut short by Christianity. According to his view, human development reached a high point with the Roman Empire, but with the introduction of Christianity it has been on a downward decline ever since. The Greeks and the Romans reached great heights in the sciences and the arts which prepared the way for future developments. But then with Christianity came the Middle Ages where much of this information was lost and had to be reinvented or rediscovered by later ages. Even the modern world,

91 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 55, pp. 295–298; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 55, pp. 173–175.

92 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 55, p. 296; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 55, p. 173.

93 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, §§ 58–59, pp. 304–309; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §§ 58–59, pp. 179–183.

94 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 58, p. 304; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 58, p. 179. Note that Nietzsche claims that Christianity also undermined the rich culture of the Medieval world of Islam: Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 60, pp. 309–310; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 60, pp. 183–184.

which has made important advances in these areas, still remains poisoned by the nefarious influence of Christianity, which is especially felt in the sphere of ethics and values.

Nietzsche lists a litany of ills that he believes Christianity is responsible for introducing into the world: the concepts of sin, the equality of all human beings before God, an afterlife in the beyond, and a disdain for the body.[95] As we have seen, all of these can be understood as forms of alienation. Nietzsche holds Christianity responsible for stunting the growth and development of humanity through the ages. Towards the end the work he issues an uncompromising declaration, "I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity, the one great instinct for revenge for which no expedient is sufficiently poisonous, secret, subterranean, petty—I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind."[96] Christianity has thus stood in the way of human progress and left us modern human beings fundamentally alienated from our true nature.

However, Nietzsche does not end the work on the negative note. Instead, he hints at a new age that will come as a result of his thought. He writes, "And one calculates *time* from the *dies nefastus* on which this fatality arose—from the first day of Christianity!—*Why not from its last?—From today?*"[97] Here he of course refers to the way in which we count the years beginning with the birth of Christ, that is, A.D., *anno domino*, the year of our Lord. He then implies that this method of calculating should change in a new era when the negative influence of Christianity has, thanks to his writings, been fully recognized.

Here one can see an echo of the end of *The Essence of Christianity*, where Feuerbach claimed that the "necessary turning-point of history" was when people recognized the truth of his theory of projection.[98] One can also hear a whisper of the revolutionary tone of Marx, who wants to apply the theory of Feuerbach to society and cause a radical change in the social order. Nietzsche likewise seems to conceive of his work in the same way: it too is intended to be the stimulus for a radical revolution. He implicitly enjoins his future readers to

95 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 56, p. 298; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 56, p. 175.

96 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, § 62, pp. 312–313; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 62, pp. 186–187.

97 This passage does not appear in the original edition but was only added to subsequent editions. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vols. 1–15, 2nd ed., ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin and New York: De Gruyter 1988, vol. 6, § 62, p. 253; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 62, p. 187.

98 Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christenthums*, Zweite vermehrte Auflage, Leipzig: Otto Wigand 1843, p. 401; Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. by Marian Evans, New York: Calvin Blanchard 1855, p. 340.

a "Revaluation of all values" that will set right the damage done by Christianity.[99] Only with such a revolutionary change in the modern value system will it be possible to return to a condition in which humans are again in harmony with their true nature.

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99 Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 6, § 62, p. 253; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 62, p. 187.

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CHAPTER 12

Nietzsche on Religion: *Das Religiöse Wesen*

Daniel Conway

Abstract

In Part Three of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Friedrich Nietzsche undertakes (and delivers) an ambitiously comprehensive and surprisingly sympathetic diagnosis of the role of religion in late modern European culture. Deploying an early version of what he will later advertise as his "genealogical" approach, Nietzsche isolates the *Wesen* of European Christianity in the "religious neurosis" it promotes in its faithful adherents. As this "neurosis" has attained epidemic proportions in the second half of the nineteenth century, European Christianity has declared its independence and asserted a claim to cultural sovereignty, thereby abandoning the (merely) subordinate role that religion is meant to play—or so Nietzsche insists—in the cultural advancement of a healthy, thriving polity. Despite issuing a summary indictment of the "calamity" wrought by European Christianity, Nietzsche nevertheless spies a bright future in the post-Christian epoch to come for a religion that no longer bears the metaphysical freight of European theism.

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Popularly received as an enemy of organized religion and as the scourge of Christianity in particular, the German-born philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) undertakes a surprisingly nuanced investigation of the status of religion in the context of late modern European culture. While critical of European Christianity in its most advanced incarnation, Nietzsche not only acknowledges the potential benefits of religions like Christianity, but also blames the crisis of late modernity on the dereliction of those—whom he identifies as *philosophers*—who are responsible for monitoring Christianity and containing its influence.

In the first book of the post-Zarathustran period of his career, *Beyond Good and Evil*,[1] Nietzsche offers to isolate *das religiöse Wesen*, which he proceeds to

1 References to Nietzsche's correspondence are designated by the abbreviation SB (*Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe in 8 Bänden*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin: dtv/de Gruyter 1986).

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locate in the "religious neurosis" that afflicts all those who aspire successfully to the faith prescribed to them by European Christianity. While mindful of the potential and actual benefits of this "neurosis" for (some of) those who suffer its effects, he is primarily concerned to illuminate the damage caused by the recent outbreak of the "religious neurosis." According to him, this outbreak has recently attained epidemic proportions, as evidenced by the assertion on behalf of European Christianity of a neurotic claim to cultural independence and sovereignty. Rather than serve as a versatile tool of discipline and control—which, Nietzsche reveals, is the *genuine* "essence" or "nature" of religion—European Christianity has arrogated to itself the twin tasks of directing culture and determining the best future for humanity. These are tasks, Nietzsche assures us, to which *no* religion, much less the decadent, neurotic religion of contemporary Christianity, is suited. As history reveals, the ongoing project of elevating humanity is best served by a cultural order of rank in which religion plays a distinctly subordinate role, in the service of those leaders and lawgivers who have earned the right to determine the future of humanity (or of European culture as its proxy).

It is on the strength of this diagnosis that Nietzsche calls for the arrival of those "new" philosophers, the "philosophers of the future," who will restore the crippled order of rank and reclaim the prerogative to determine the "Wherefore and Whither of humanity."[2] As a means of hastening the arrival of these "new" philosophers, Nietzsche invites his readers to join him in exposing the "religious neurosis" and expressing the appropriate level of outrage over the "calamity" wrought by European Christianity.[3]

1 On the Anthropology of Religion

The title that Nietzsche selects for Part Three of *Beyond Good and Evil—Das religiöse Wesen*—is almost certainly intended to confound.[4] While his choice of the noun *Wesen* suggests that he is concerned to determine "what religion is," e.g., by delivering a general definition or theoretical account, he restricts himself in his ensuing investigation to a consideration of one religion in particular—namely,

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Random House 1989, p. 136.

3 Ibid., pp. 74–76.

4 In his letter to C. Heymons (at Carl Duncker's Verlag) on 12 April 1886, Nietzsche explained that the envisioned third Part [*Abschnitt*] of *Beyond Good and Evil* was to be called "Das religiöse Genie" [The Religious Genius] rather than "Das religiöse Wesen" (*SB*, vol. 7, p. 175.)

European Christianity. Nor is that the extent of his misdirection. Rather than determine "what *this* religion is" in some general or theoretical sense, he instead directs our attention to its most enduring effects on those individuals—soon to be introduced as the *homines religiosi*—whose fictile souls it has molded. In this case, at least, he arrives at an understanding of "what religion is" by examining what it has done to (and for) those to whom it has ministered. As we shall see, this is a decisive methodological innovation on his part, for it allows him to bracket or ignore the claims made for European Christianity by its leading champions and apologists. Not unlike a 21st-century medical examiner, he will allow the autopsy he conducts to drive the story he tells.

The ambiguity embedded in the title of Part Three is reflected in the range of translations suggested by Anglophone scholars. Although *Wesen* is commonly rendered as "nature" or "essence"—as in Douglas Burnham's lapidary discussion of "The Nature of Religion"[5]—the German noun can be difficult to translate with confidence into English. This difficulty is compounded in the case of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche is keen to declare his independence from (and opposition to) those sages who seek "essences" and "natures" beyond the world of flux and becoming. Inasmuch as *Wesen* might call to mind the wayward efforts of those dogmatists and idealists whom he skewers in his Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, it seems unlikely that he intended his investigation in Part Three to yield a perfect, unchanging, suprasensible "essence." Say what we will about his unorthodox approach in Part Three of the text, he is determined not to be ridiculed as a "clumsy" and "obtrusive" lover of the "woman" known as *Truth*.[6]

Cognizant of this determination, Leo Strauss notes that Nietzsche's choice of words is neither accidental nor thoughtless: "The third chapter [of *Beyond Good and Evil*] is entitled "*Das religiöse Wesen*"; it is not entitled *"Das Wesen der Religion,'* one of the reasons for this being that the essence of religion, that which is common to all religions, is not or should not be of any concern to us."[7] Tempering the extreme position marked out by Strauss, Laurence Lampert explains that "The meaning of the title of chapter 3, *Das religiöse Wesen,* is thus indicated by the first words of the first section: the religious *essence* is to be sought in the religious *being,* not in the objects of religious longing or

5 Douglas Burnham, *Reading Nietzsche: An Analysis of* Beyond Good and Evil, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 2007, p. 75. Burnham also recommends "The Religious Character" as "an equally suitable translation of the title" of Part Three.

6 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 1–3.

7 Leo Strauss, "A Note on the Plan of *Beyond Good and Evil*," in *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, Volume IV, ed. by Daniel Conway, London: Routledge 1998, p. 327.

religious dread."[8] Along the lines suggested by Lampert's friendly amendment, Walter Kaufmann, the most influential of Nietzsche's Anglophone translators to date, renders *Das religiöse Wesen* as "What is Religious," where the "what" in question is understood to be a matter of empirical/scientific inquiry. More recently, the distinguished scholar and translator Adrian Del Caro has suggested "The Religious Character," which, as we shall see, faithfully preserves the double meaning that Nietzsche intended *Wesen* to convey in this context. In short, the defining "character" of a religion—or, at least, of the religion under consideration—is revealed in the "character" displayed by those "characters" whom it has produced in its image.

As these translators variously confirm, the title of Part Three of *Beyond Good and Evil* is meant not only to register Nietzsche's rejection of Platonism and its pursuit of otherworldly Forms, but also to reclaim the concept of "essence" or "nature" that *Wesen* is understood to suggest. Rather than abandon the search for "essences" and "natures," philosophers must learn to look elsewhere—to history, geography, politics, science, *and*, most importantly, to "the proper physio-psychology" that Nietzsche recommends to his readers.[9] As it turns out, we will learn "what religion is" only if we *begin*—thereby reversing the traditional priority of theory to practice—by bravely facing up to what religion has done (and continues to do), regardless of what its champions may promise or preach. Following Nietzsche's lead, that is, we would do well to examine the religion in question on the basis of what it has in fact accomplished, which we may do, as he indicates, by attending to the "character" of the "beings" in whom its *Wesen* is faithfully reflected.

Contrary to what Strauss claims on Nietzsche's behalf, "the essence of religion, that which is common to all religions," should be of the *greatest* concern to the readers of *Beyond Good and Evil*. The reason for this, as we shall see, is that European Christianity deviates so dramatically from the (subordinate) role that religions traditionally have played in the cultural elevation of the peoples and nations they have served. In Part Three of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche not only delivers his account of the *Wesen* of European Christianity, i.e., as it is manifested by the religious "beings" or "characters" whom he interrogates, but also mobilizes this account—and the "calamity" it confirms—to isolate the *Wesen* of religion itself. What a properly historical survey of religions reveals is that the *Wesen* of religion lies in its use and application as a tool

8 Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of* Beyond Good and Evil, New Haven: Yale University Press 2001, p. 102.

9 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 31–32.

of discipline and control, as manifested in the "character" or "being" of those individuals whom it is tasked to mind and mold.

According to Nietzsche's account in Part Three of *Beyond Good and Evil*, European Christianity is now a religion in name only, for it has abandoned (what he regards as) its essential role in contributing as directed to the elevation of culture. Having asserted an illegitimate claim to independence and sovereignty, European Christianity now presents itself as the highest arbiter of culture, beholden to none, answerable only to itself. In the absence of any meaningful resistance from a cognizant lawgiver or ruling caste, European Christianity now operates free of the customary (and necessarily intrusive) forms of political oversight. As a result, the *Wesen* unique to European Christianity—which, as we shall see, takes the form of a "religious neurosis"—has been propagated to epidemic proportions throughout Europe.[10] If religion is to contribute as expected (and needed) to the production of a "philosophy of the future," it must be returned to its rightful (= subordinate) place within the cultural order of rank.

In addition to alerting his readers to the ongoing normalization of the "religious neurosis," Nietzsche also intends to disabuse them of the notion that the practice of religion points naturally or inevitably to the crisis he documents in Part Three. As we shall see, the "religious neurosis" attains epidemic proportions only if (and when) the genuine *Wesen* of religion is misidentified, neglected, or disregarded. Although religion has a constructive (albeit instrumental) role to play in the composition and regulation of any healthy society, it cannot be allowed, much less suffered, to play a leading role in the society and culture it is meant to serve. Indeed, it is only under the delusions induced by "neurosis" (and ignored by relevant authorities) that any religion may assert a claim to independence and cultural sovereignty.

2 Hunting the Souls of the *Homines Religiosi*

Nietzsche begins his investigation of *das religiöse Wesen* by raising the general question of "the human soul and its limits, the range of inner human experiences reached so far, the heights, depths, and distances of these experiences, the whole history of the soul *so far* and its as yet unexhausted possibilities."[11] Anticipating the "task" he eventually will assign to his readers,[12] he presents

10 Ibid., pp. 61–62.
11 Ibid., pp. 59–60.
12 Ibid., p. 230.

the "human soul" as the "predestined hunting ground" for all those who, like him, are "born psychologists" and naturally thrill to the hunt.[13] Lamenting once again the lack of kindred huntsmen among his contemporaries, Nietzsche flatters his readers by suggesting that *they* may yet display the "courage, sense, and subtlety" that are required of those whom he aims to recruit.[14] If his readers are to acquire the aforementioned virtues, of course, they will need to avail themselves of the education and training on offer in *Beyond Good and Evil*, to the conduct of which he now returns.

As he does so, he narrows considerably the focus of his proposed investigation of the soul, urging his readers to attend to the myriad ways in which the souls of religious human beings have been formed (and, of course, deformed) by their encounters with various regimes of discipline and control. In particular, he bids his readers to take note of the diverse historical shapes that have been produced as religious leaders (and their patrons) have imposed their favored solutions to the "problem of *knowledge* [*Wissen*] *and conscience* [*Gewissen*]."[15] Although Nietzsche's wordplay does not survive its translation into English, his point is clear enough: He instructs his readers to zero in on the "problem" of negotiating the competing demands of reason (or science) and faith (or religion).[16] As he proceeds to explain, these negotiations have marked the human soul as an oft-scarred battleground, over which religious enthusiasts of all and changing stripes have struggled and fought. The outcome "*so far*," as we shall see, is a multiform soul at war with itself, which, he believes, is nevertheless poised to contribute to the timely conclusion of the (merely) "moral" epoch in human history.

The approach that Nietzsche adopts as he narrows the focus of his investigation is distinctly and unapologetically *anthropological*.[17] Rather than attend to doctrinal claims and disputes pertaining to theology, or to abstract

13 Ibid., pp. 59–60.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 I have replaced Kaufmann's suggestion of "science," which faithfully captures Nietzsche's wordplay, with "knowledge," which is the more familiar and standard English translation of *Wissen*. Later on, Nietzsche recasts this "problem" as "the ancient theological problem of 'faith' [*Glauben*] and 'knowledge' [*Wissen*]—or, more clearly, of instinct [*Instinkt*] and reason [*Vernuft*]—in other words, the question whether regarding the valuation of things instinct deserves more authority than rationality [*Vernüftigkeit*], which wants us to evaluate and act in accordance with reasons, with a 'why?'" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 191).

17 Here I follow Andreas Urs Sommer, *Kommentar zu Nietzsches* Jenseits von Gut und Böse, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2016, pp. 311–12. On the promise and limits of Nietzsche's anthropological approach, see Vanessa Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2020, especially chapter 2.

speculations about the nature and character of the divine, he aims to determine "the religious *Wesen*" by documenting the various ways in which religion has contributed, as a tool of discipline and control, to the development of European civilization. He thus endeavors to isolate the "character" of religion by investigating the "character" of the individuals it has variously served and dis-served. Toward this end, he introduces the subjects of his investigation as the *homines religiosi*,[18] thereby suggesting that "those who are religious" are ripe for the careful scrutiny and precise taxonomic classification that await any newly isolated species or subgroup. Notwithstanding the impediments they place in the path of the intrepid "hunters" whom Nietzsche rallies to his cause, the *homines religiosi* are useful to him and his readers as study-worthy subjects in whom the "religious *Wesen*" has attained its full, sickly bloom.

That Nietzsche's readers are likely to belong *among* the *homines religiosi* is treated here not as cause for disqualification, but as an advantage to be seized and exploited. Unlike those scientific methods and approaches that prize objectivity and disinterestedness above all else, Nietzsche's anthropological approach relies on—and in fact celebrates—the first-personal experiences of those who join him. In order to arrive at a comprehensive reckoning of the uniquely human costs and benefits of religion, the "hunters" whom he means to recruit must be in a position to understand *from the inside*—and not merely from the clinical distance favored by traditional scholars—what it means to have suffered under the imposition of a prescribed diet of reason and faith. Hence his forthright admission that those who would join him "might perhaps have to be as profound, as wounded, as monstrous as Pascal's intellectual conscience was."[19] Pascal is of interest here not only for his recognition that aspirants to Christian faith are obliged to "sacrifice the intellect," but also for his apparent success in reaping an unexpected spiritual windfall from this otherwise crippling sacrifice.[20] As this complex appreciation of Pascal suggests, Nietzsche's evaluation of *das religiöse Wesen* is meant to disclose both the damage European Christianity has wrought and the (limited) productive uses to which it may yet be put.

As Nietzsche's "sequel" to *Beyond Good and Evil* makes clear, the anthropological approach he favors, identified there as *genealogy*, yields a science in disrepute. He turns to the past not to solve a problem of little or no personal interest to him, but to understand a present crisis and to secure a measure of

18 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 59–60.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., pp. 158–59. In his letter of 20 November 1888 to Georg Brandes, Nietzsche refers to Pascal, whom he "almost loves," as the "only logical Christian" (*SB*, vol. 8, p. 483).

hope for the future. Indeed, the problems he addresses are those that are closest and most urgent to him and his fellow "hunters." They are recruited, after all, because they have something—nay, *everything*—at stake in the outcome, which is why they are likely to take bold steps to disclose the truths that elude scholars of a more traditional (= risk-averse) temperament. Are Nietzsche and his fellow huntsmen perhaps *too* close to the subject matter to render a valid determination and judgment of *das religiöse Wesen*? Of course they are! Indeed, he acknowledges as much throughout *Beyond Good and Evil*. But that is a danger he is willing to court. According to him, the stakes are simply too high, the peril too great, not to consult those victims of European Christianity who may bear credible witness to its abiding *Wesen*.

Nietzsche proceeds in Sections 46–60 to survey the diverse ways in which the *homines religiosi* have variously been directed to negotiate the competing claims of reason and faith. Toward this end, he considers the sacrificial faith of Christianity;[21] the divergent approaches and sensibilities developed in the Protestant North and Catholic South of Europe;[22] the excessive "gratitude" [*Dankbarkeit*] expressed in the "religiosity of the ancient Greeks";[23] the "passion for God";[24] the intriguing case of the saint; [25] the grand style of the Hebrew Bible;[26] the crypto-religiosity of contemporary atheism;[27] the anti-religious nihilism of modern philosophy;[28] the corrosion of the religious instincts by the eclipse of leisure and the valorization of "industriousness";[29] contemporary "piety" as an

21 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 60–62.

22 Ibid., pp. 62–63. In Book Five of *The Gay Science*, which Nietzsche wrote shortly after the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*, he offers two preliminary attempts to categorize, and thereby "honor" the *homines religiosi*. First of all, he sketches a distinction between "the more common, merrier, more familiar, ingenuous, and superficial type" and "the graver, deeper, more meditative, that is, more evil and suspicious" type of *homines religiosi*, onto which he maps the ongoing tensions between the Protestant North and the Catholic South of Europe. With respect to both distinctions, the former type may be seen to resist the "dominion" of the latter type, especially inasmuch as the former type prefers a stronger emphasis on faith and a lighter emphasis on reason (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Random House 1974, pp. 292–93).

23 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 64.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 65.

26 Ibid., pp. 65–66.

27 Ibid., p. 66.

28 Ibid., pp. 66–69.

29 Ibid., pp. 69–71.

expression of the "*fear* of truth";[30] and the precariousness of loving humanity not for its own sake but "for God's sake."[31]

His aims in conducting this survey of religious types are complex: On the one hand, he wishes to demonstrate the sheer diversity of historical attempts to negotiate the competing claims of reason and faith. Judging from the data collected by this survey, one might be tempted to conclude that there is no single "essence" or "nature" of religion, unless it is determined to reside in the (unremarkable) fact that any religion must endeavor to strike some such balance. On the other hand, Nietzsche positions himself to explain, as he does in Sections 61–62,[32] that there *is* an "essence" of religion after all, in the sense that religion is uniquely suited to play a decisive (albeit subordinate) role in the production and ongoing elevation of a healthy, thriving culture.

3 Dissolving the Paradox of the Saint

In Sections 45–52, Nietzsche introduces his readers to the task of determining what we may legitimately understand to be the *Wesen* of European Christianity. In his typically breezy manner, he devotes all of one section to an analysis that transports his whiplashed readers from the origins of Christianity, wherein faith appears under the sign of *sacrifice*—"of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit"—to the French Revolution, which he brands as "the last great slave rebellion."[33]

He thus introduces in germinal form his influential diagnosis of Christianity, advanced in Part Nine of *Beyond Good and Evil* and developed in Essay I of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, as an exemplar of the "slave morality," wherein suffering and bondage are hailed as indices of "goodness" and down payments on redemption.[34] Later in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he traces the initial outbreak of the "slave rebellion" (and the founding of the "slave morality") to the "inversion [*Umkehrung*] of values" that was accomplished, supposedly, by the Israelites of the Second Temple period.[35] According to him, the world-historical "significance of the Jewish people" lies in their insistence—desperate, but ultimately successful—that the values cherished by their oppressors and captors

30 Ibid., p. 71.
31 Ibid., p. 72.
32 Ibid., pp. 72–76.
33 Ibid., pp. 60–61.
34 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Random House 1989, pp. 36–43.
35 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 108.

marked them as "evil." As the victims of this "evil" aggression, the Jews hailed themselves as "good," "holy," "blessed," and so forth. That they were obliged to live as slaves, they further insisted, was evidence of their status as the "chosen people."[36]

In his next book, which he recommends as a "sequel" to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche provides additional details pertaining to the rise of European Christianity. In an attempt to furnish the relevant backstory, he likens Christianity (in its original form) to the "crown" of a "tree of vengefulness and hatred, Jewish hatred."[37] Without disputing that Christianity is almost universally known as a religion of *love*—indeed, "the profoundest and sublimest kind of love"[38]—he treats Christian love not as the repudiation of Jewish hatred, but as its outgrowth and completion. He thus attributes the eventual emergence of Christianity, as the morality of good and evil *par excellence*, to the creative *ressentiment* of the Israelites of the Second Temple Period.[39]

Nietzsche introduces without fanfare the payoff of his anthropological approach to the aforementioned "problem." (Indeed, he proceeds as if his diagnosis were a settled matter of fact, which, as far as his target readership is concerned, may very well be the case.) As we learn, the sacrifice required of those who aspire to Christian faith is sufficiently severe as to produce in them the "religious neurosis," which, as he confirms, is "the religious *Wesen*" that is distinctive of European Christianity.[40]

At this point in the elaboration of his argument, he is not inclined to denounce Christianity on this basis, for he regards its besetting "neurosis" as potentially conducive to social cohesion and political stability. Christianity becomes problematic when, as has happened occasionally throughout its history, it escapes the structures designated for its containment and threatens the wellbeing of the society and/or polity it was supposed to serve. According to Nietzsche, the most impactful and dangerous of these outbreaks is currently underway, which, as he later confirms, is a cause for immediate concern: "a smaller, almost ridiculous type, a herd animal, something eager to please, sickly, and mediocre has been bred, the European of today."[41] His aim in forwarding this grim diagnosis is not simply to shock his readers, who very well may have underestimated the extent of the "calamity" he describes, but also to

36 Ibid.
37 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 34–35.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 61–62.
41 Ibid., p. 76.

chart a realistic way forward. Despite having attained epidemic proportions, the "religious neurosis" may be exposed (and even battled) as Europe awaits the arrival of those "new" philosophers who will contain its spread and return religion to its "natural" or "essential" role as a tool of discipline and control.

Having identified the historical emergence of what he has already determined to be the "religious neurosis," Nietzsche links its appearance to "three dangerous dietary demands: solitude, fasting, and sexual abstinence."[42] (Without saying so explicitly, Nietzsche has introduced the theme of *religious asceticism* and, by extension, the role of the *ascetic priest* in promoting and normalizing the "religious neurosis.") Immediately conceding that he cannot in good faith assign cause and effect in the case of this linkage—at least not yet—he cautions his readers to tread very carefully as they move forward.[43] After floating the possibility that the "religious neurosis" may be indicative of an underlying (but undiagnosed) physiological condition, e.g., epilepsy,[44] he warns his readers (and himself) to beware the "lavish growth of nonsense and superstition" that obscures their view of "the religious neurosis."[45]

Seeking firmer ground and a clearer line of vision, Nietzsche turns to two predecessors of note and influence: Schopenhauer and Wagner, both of whom were determined to investigate the phenomenon of the "denial of the will."[46] Building on the insights recorded by these predecessors, he narrows his focus yet again, posing the question that lesser historians of religion dare not raise: "how is the saint possible?"[47] His surmise here is that the standard interpretation of the attainment of sainthood only ever begs the question: If the saint stands forth on the strength of his titanic will, which he is said to exert in control or denial of itself, wherein lies his saintliness? Is the saint's mastery of the will supposed to be the problem (or sin), the solution (or redemption), or both? And why do we permit the saint's achievement, whatever its mechanism turns out to involve, to divert our attention from the (misdiagnosed) neurosis he manifests? That the "miracle" of sainthood continues to fascinate (and confound) is itself evidence of the extent of the neurosis in question. Like misery, as we shall see, neurosis loves company.

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42 Ibid., p. 61.

43 Ibid.

44 In his next book, he revisits this speculative diagnosis, especially with respect to the various European "epidemics" that he identifies as outbreaks of "epilepsy" (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 142–43).

45 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 61.

46 Ibid., p. 62.

47 Ibid.

Before we consider Nietzsche's account of "the religious neurosis," we should note that he does not mean to claim here that *all* religions are or have been expressions of the "neurosis" he offers to diagnose. Although the "neurosis" in question antedates the historical emergence of Christianity, originating not in Europe but "in the Orient, the *deep* Orient,"[48] he is primarily concerned to track its manifestations within the ambit of European Christianity, whose faithful adherents voluntarily cultivate the ascetic virtues of *selflessness*, even to the point, as in the case of the "saintly" type, of emptying the self and basking in the admiration of others for having done so.

Proposing the *saint* as the type in which "the religious neurosis" typically attains its apotheosis, Nietzsche asserts that the protracted misunderstanding (and self-misunderstanding) of Christianity trades on a surprisingly simple error of "interpretation."[49] As he did in his earlier discussion of the martyr,[50] he endeavors here to distinguish *his* philosophical approach from the "bad philology" practiced by his rivals among the historians of morality. Having already observed that "all psychology thus far has gotten stuck in moral prejudices and fears,"[51] he notes here that the would-be science of psychology "suffered shipwreck" when it approached the "miracle" of the saint.[52] According to him, this so-called "miracle," which is alleged to have catalyzed the sudden conversion of a "bad man" into a "good man," in fact trades on an unsubstantiated—and now obsolete—belief in "opposite moral values."[53] Once his readers are disabused of this belief, he implies, the "miracle" in question will dissolve before their very eyes. Rather than prostrate themselves before the aforementioned "miracle," or the "saint" who is its supposed host, they will behold and investigate the all-too-human (and all-too-familiar) phenomenon of a soul turned *against* itself, i.e., an unfortunate, neurotic soul that derives its optimal experience of freedom and power from its perfection of the virtues of self-denial and self-abnegation.

In order to accomplish this objective, of course, Nietzsche and his best readers will need to update or abandon the standard approach to psychology, which, he observes, has "placed itself under the dominion of morals."[54] This is the perfect occasion, in fact, to take a preliminary stand "beyond good and evil," e.g., by recasting the saint as an extra-moral type—i.e., as neither "good" nor "bad" nor miraculously transformed—in whom the will to power is acknowledged to

48 Ibid., pp. 60–61.
49 Ibid., p. 62.
50 Ibid., pp. 35–36.
51 Ibid., p. 31.
52 Ibid., p. 62.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.

have turned *against* itself to productive (albeit short-term) effect.[55] Nietzsche thus accounts for the enduring appeal of the saint in terms of the common (and widespread) misinterpretation of the *meaning* of his prowess with respect to "self-conquest and deliberate final renunciation."[56] Although the saint may *appear* to have solved "the riddle of the soul," which, if true, would warrant the attention the saint has in fact received over the years, the truth of the matter is far less mysterious and, potentially, far more interesting.

As Nietzsche proceeds to demonstrate, the alleged transformation is achieved not by the extirpation—miraculous or otherwise—of the drives and affects that are purported to be productive of wickedness, but by their creative redirection. The so-called "saint" has turned his wicked drives and affects against *himself*, eventually deriving a feeling of power (and blissful self-negation) from having done so. In truth, the "saint" remains every bit as "wicked" as before (i.e., when he was said to be a "bad man"). Rather than vent his native cruelty against external others, who no doubt would have judged him to be either "wicked" or foolish, he now directs his native cruelty against himself, as a meet and satisfying punishment for the sinfulness he has learned, with the help of the priest, to locate within himself. The supposed "goodness" of the "saint" is thus a morally freighted misinterpretation of the (seemingly pro-social) outward expression of his besetting neurosis.

As it is exemplified by the saint, the "religious neurosis" rounds into view as a two-stage affliction: First, the "saint" traces his "wicked" thoughts and deeds to their (allegedly) sinful source in his passions and affects, voluntarily taking on the requisite burden of guilt. Second, the "saint" anaesthetizes himself by directing against himself the full fury of his righteous, sin-seeking will.[57] Duly narcotized by the "orgies of feeling" he has orchestrated within his troubled soul,[58] the "saint" may appear to unsuspecting witnesses to have attained the tranquility and composure that are associated by pagans with *ataraxia*, by Buddhists with *nirvana*, and by Christians with *beatitude*. Nietzsche thus explains that (and why) the "saint" has been able—until now—to induce awe

55 In his "sequel" to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche contributes additional detail and context: "In this psychical cruelty there resides an insanity of the will [*Willens-Wahnsinn*] which is absolutely unexampled: the *will* of man to find himself guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for…Oh this insane [*wahnsinnige*], pathetic beast—man! What ideas he has, what unnaturalness, what paroxysms of nonsense, what *bestiality of thought* erupts as soon as he is prevented just a little from being a *beast in deed*!…" (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 92–93).

56 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 65.

57 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 92–93.

58 Ibid., p. 139.

and suspicion in those who (mistakenly) infer that extreme feats of self-denial are evidence of "a new power, a strange, as yet unconquered enemy."[59]

Nietzsche's heterodox profile of the saint is meant to model to his readers the anthropological approach he more generally recommends, as well as the explanatory power of an "extra-moral" application of the science of psychology. To wit: determining the (scientific) truth about complex psychological phenomena is valuable not only as a means of setting the record straight and banishing stubborn moral-religious prejudices, but also as a means of disclosing the full range, capacity, and plasticity of the human soul. That a soul may be turned against itself, thereby creating for itself a transient (but ultimately self-defeating) experience of freedom and power, is an insight that future lawgivers will be eager to mobilize to optimal effect. This is an insight, moreover, that may serve to immunize Nietzsche and his readers against the seductions arising from exotic expressions of the religious neurosis. Unlike those thick-headed beast-of-prey nobles who were bamboozled by the occult arts practiced by the ascetic priest,[60] Nietzsche and his readers will be on high alert for previously unreported symptoms of the "religious neurosis."

As we shall see, Nietzsche's alternative account of the saint has once again complicated his task in Part Three. He is now obliged to persuade his readers of the morbidity of a religion that is widely acknowledged to be perfectly normal, credibly universal in scope, and eminently functional. To this task he now turns.

4 The Religious Instinct

The momentous question the saint elicits from others is withheld for now,[61] and Nietzsche treats this rhetorical break in his narrative as an occasion to renew his opposition to the claim, lodged by Social Darwinists and others, that the *homines religiosi* of contemporary Europe represent the apex of human evolution to date. According to Nietzsche, one need only compare the Hebrew

59 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 65. The confusion on the part of those who witness the saint is instructively reconstructed by Lampert: "Lacking a psychology of their own will to power, [the worldly powerful who encountered the saint] failed to understand the more spiritual forms the will to power could take" (Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, p. 110). See also Burnham, *Reading Nietzsche*, pp. 79–80; and Christa Davis Acampora and Keith Ansell Pearson, *Nietzsche's* Beyond Good and Evil: *A Reader's Guide*, London: Continuum 2011, pp. 84–85.

60 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 125–28.

61 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 65.

Bible, "the book of divine justice,"[62] and the Christian New Testament in order to appreciate just how far humanity has fallen from its previously attained heights. What he wishes his readers to understand here is that a people or nation cannot reject the religiosity of its great and noble predecessors *and* expect to become great and noble in turn. Thus begins in earnest his effort to disclose to his readers the *Wesen* of religion, which rounds into view in contrast to the (recently diagnosed) *Wesen* of European Christianity.

What Nietzsche calls the "religious instinct" may be understood in anthropological terms as an aspiration on the part of a people or nation to grow and thrive through its acceptance of an appropriate burden of obligations (or debts) to venerable, otherworldly others (e.g., ancestors, kings, founders, creators, gods). As such, the aim of the "religious instinct" is to cultivate a (binding) relationship to the divine, by means of which a people or nation agrees to take on an ever-increasing burden of obligations (or debts), which, when finally discharged (or repaid), will prove the value (and valor) of the people or nation in question. Do these venerable, otherworldly others actually exist? Despite his popular reputation as a rabid atheist, Nietzsche is obliged by his anthropological approach to leave this question unasked and unanswered. What is crucial for his investigation is what the *homines religiosi* believe to be true.

Nietzsche thus invites his readers to interpret the "religious instinct" as indicative of the relative health and strength of the people or nation it represents. On the one hand, a healthy people or nation or will instinctively fashion for itself the kind of obligation-laden religion that will challenge it to continue its upward trajectory of growth and self-overcoming. Fearful of dishonoring its monitory elders or disappointing its cognizant deities, and eager to express its gratitude for the benefaction it has received thus far, a healthy people or nation will hold itself to ever higher standards of virtue, success, and prosperity, precisely so that it may continue to please those patrons to whom it (believes it) owes its good fortune. Simply put, healthy human beings instinctively desire (and expect to take on) those obligations that will elicit from them the best versions of themselves. The hardships involved in discharging these obligations are understood to be both necessary and acceptable, but only in the event that one's continued growth is either palpable or, if delayed for any reason, credible.

On the other hand, a declining people or nation will instinctively fashion for itself a religion characterized by minimal responsibilities and universal affirmation. In pronouncing themselves sinners, for example, contemporary

62 Ibid.

Christians may *appear* to accept responsibility for their supposedly fallen nature, but they in fact refuse any additional responsibilities that might challenge them to grow and thrive. (It is only as self-avowed sinners, after all, that Christians gain entrée to the consciousness-blotting narcosis that reliably relieves them, temporarily, of their vexed selfhood.) Rather than bind themselves to a religion that will burden them with the obligations that are likely to elicit what is best within them, they subscribe to a religion that rewards minimal exertion with unearned affirmation and the promise of eternal salvation.

Hence the point of the provocative comparison Nietzsche chooses to emphasize: The Hebrew Bible attests to a people—Nietzsche has in mind the "kingly" Israelites of the First Temple Period (A 25)—for whom nothing short of a vengeful god would suffice to prompt them to greatness, while the New Testament offers teachings tailored to those of whom not too much should (or will) be expected.[63] His assumption here, which he elsewhere articulates and defends at greater length, is that enduring growth, whether in the individual, the collective, or the culture, requires a continued escalation of the challenges and obstacles one is expected to face and surmount. In this respect, we may associate the onset of cultural decay with the refusal to accept any additional burdens of obligation (or debt).

5 The Misanthropic Agenda of Modern Philosophy

Nietzsche then pivots to a discussion of the compensatory religiosity expressed by modern philosophy. His stated reason for doing so is to confirm his observation that the "religious instinct" in Europe has continued to grow, despite the waning appeal of the "theistic satisfaction" that formerly sufficed.[64]

What this means, as we have seen, is that (some) Europeans apparently yearn to be assigned a burden of obligations (and debts) in excess of what Christianity (= "theism") currently expects of them. If that were true, the future of humankind (or of European civilization as its proxy) might yet be secured by leaders and lawgivers who authorize a post-Christian religion that demands more of its adherents (and delivers more in turn). Nietzsche thus aims to persuade his readers that the current gulf between the "religious instinct" and the standard (= Christian) forms of "theistic satisfaction" is indicative both of an escalating crisis *and* of a potentially promising opportunity for self-overcoming. Indeed, if the rise of European atheism may be traced to

63 Ibid., pp. 65–66.
64 Ibid., p. 66.

the philosophical and religious assaults on God in His traditionally masculine roles as "father," "judge," "rewarder," and confessor, as Nietzsche claims is the case,[65] then it may be possible to begin the process of harnessing the "religious instinct" for the social and political ends outlined by Nietzsche in the remainder of *Beyond Good and Evil*. While the eventual disposition and content of a post-Christian religion must be left to the discretion of the "new" philosophers, Nietzsche and his readers may be in a good position to discredit (and perhaps ward off) the nihilism encoded in the grim satisfactions tendered by modern philosophy and science. Indeed, *Beyond Good and Evil* itself may be received as a decisive first step in this direction.

In order to document the complicity of modern philosophy in the refutation of "European theism," Nietzsche identifies three "rungs" on the "great ladder of religious cruelty."[66] Picking up the thread of his founding insight into the "nature" of Christianity and the "character" of the souls it molds,[67] Nietzsche returns to the theme of *sacrifice*. Initially, corresponding perhaps to what he has called the *pre-moral* epoch in human history,[68] the gods were understood to expect (and even demand) the sacrifice of other human beings, including those who were dearest or most beloved. Throughout the subsequent *moral* epoch, devout human beings have been expected (and willing) to sacrifice what is best and noblest within *themselves*—i.e., their "strongest instincts," their very "nature"—so that they might gain or retain the favor of their (somewhat less cruel) gods.[69] In the *extra-moral* epoch to come, Nietzsche speculates, there will be nothing of surpassing value left to sacrifice, with the exception of one's gods.[70]

Inasmuch as the imperative to sacrifice was supposedly imposed by these very gods, and validated on their authority, the meaningfulness of sacrifice itself—on which, as we have seen, the zealous, intellect-wounding faith of European theism has been predicated[71]—will dissipate in due course. Having sacrificed everything of value, and unable as a result to generate meaning for its faithful adherents, European theism will join modern science in declaring the non-negotiable meaninglessness of human existence. Very soon, in other words, as European theism completes its merger with modern science, both

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., p. 67.
67 Ibid., pp. 60–61.
68 Ibid., pp. 43–45.
69 Ibid. As Burnham notes, Nietzsche thus identifies an epoch in which Jesus is sacrificed to absolve the sins of humanity *and* humanity "giv[es] up on any transcendent god as part of a religion" (*Reading Nietzsche*, p. 55).
70 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* pp. 43–45.
71 Ibid., pp. 60–61.

will be exposed as vehicles of nihilism. The vanishing point in this unhappy regression will involve the eventual "sacrifice [of] God for the nothing," the preparations for which, Nietzsche believes, are already underway in modern philosophy and science.[72]

For its part, "modern philosophy" is implicated in this unhappy regression by virtue of the motivation it derives from its "epistemological skepticism," which, when directed against the "old soul concept," reveals itself to be aggressively "*anti-Christian.*"[73] Echoing his earlier critique of Kant and German Idealism,[74] Nietzsche claims to detect in "modern philosophy" a quasi-religious fascination with—and fervor for—the systematic disavowal of the soul known to and cared for by Christians, i.e., the *immortal* soul, whose eternal reward the faithful believe they have secured. Hence his wishful attempt to connect the desire on the part of Kant—namely, "to prove that, starting from the subject, the subject could not be proved—nor could the object"—with the Vedantic teaching of the "*merely apparent existence* of…'the soul'."[75]

Once modern philosophy succeeds in banishing the soul, he continues, it will have no choice but to direct its "epistemological skepticism" toward God, whose afterworldly stewardship of the soul is no longer required, much less credible. As with the supposed progress of modern science, the progress of "modern philosophy" imbues its eager practitioners with the meaning, purpose, and direction they crave. In the long run, however, the pride they have taken in discrediting the supposed bases of human pride will subside. Like their scientific brethren, these modern philosophers eventually will embrace the nihilism they have unwittingly courted all along. What they will *not* embrace, to the disadvantage of late modern European culture, is the prerogative (and attendant responsibility) of philosophers to establish and police the cultural order of rank. As he sneers in a later section of *Beyond Good and Evil*,

> Philosophy reduced to "theory of knowledge," in fact no more than a timid epochism and doctrine of abstinence—a philosophy that never gets beyond the threshold and takes pains to *deny* itself the right to

72 As this section confirms, Nietzsche's famous pronouncement of the "death of God" is meant to mark the dawning of an "event" that will culminate in "the sacrifice [of] God for the nothing" (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 67). Inasmuch as this "event" has not yet reached its ignominious conclusion, Nietzsche feels warranted to stage the intervention that *Beyond Good and Evil* is meant to accomplish.

73 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 66.

74 Ibid., pp. 17–19.

75 Ibid., p. 67.

> enter—that is philosophy in its last throes, an end an agony, something inspiring pity. How could such a philosophy—*dominate!*[76]

Here we are reminded that Nietzsche's allegiance to the scientific worldview is presented to his readers as both enthusiastic *and* conditional. While his general intent is to liberate the scientific worldview—and, by extension, its adherents—from the moral and religious prejudices that retard the progress of its development, he is also concerned to steer the scientific worldview away from the nihilism it is currently poised to enact. As he cautions in his "sequel" to *Beyond Good and Evil*,

> *All* science…has at present the object of dissuading humankind from its former respect for itself, as if this had been nothing but a piece of bizarre conceit. One might say that its own pride, its own austere form of stoical ataraxy, consists in sustaining humanity's hard-won *self-contempt* as its ultimate and most serious claim to self-respect…[77]

As an alternative (and antidote) to the "hard won *self-contempt*" that modern science confers upon its faithful adherents, Nietzsche recommends a variant of the scientific worldview that is not only purged of unwanted moral and religious accretions, but also fully infused with nihilism-repelling cheerfulness [*Heiterkeit*].[78] In the event that humanity follows through, as expected, on its apparent determination to "sacrifice God for the nothing," Nietzsche and his readers may be uniquely prepared to survive the transition to an "extra-moral" epoch in which science once again will promote the enhancement and elevation of humankind. Whereas others will detect only darkness and gloom, Nietzsche and his "we" will welcome "a new dawn."[79]

Having alerted his best readers to their placement at or near the dawning of an "extra-moral" epoch, wherein God will be sacrificed "for the nothing,"[80] Nietzsche pauses to consider how he and they might navigate the nihilism that almost surely awaits them. Returning to the theme of a pessimism predicated of *strength*, a pessimism that is at home "beyond good and evil,"[81] he surmises

76 Ibid., p. 123.
77 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 155–56.
78 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 279–80.
79 Ibid.
80 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 67.
81 Ibid., p. 68.

that the doomsayers and misanthropes may yet be proven wrong after all. This would be the case, for example, if the pessimism he envisions were to yield

> [T]he opposite ideal: The ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably *da capo*—not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle, and not only to a spectacle but at bottom to him who needs precisely this spectacle—and who makes it necessary because again and again he needs himself—and makes himself necessary.[82]

Nietzsche's aim in this rousing passage is to prepare his readers for the selective role to be played in the "extra-moral" epoch by the grimly unsentimental pessimism he recommends for their consideration. Without discounting the disruptions and upheavals that are likely to follow in the wake of the "sacrifice [of] God for the nothing," he urges his readers to imagine the type of human being who might *thrive* under the post-theistic conditions of an "extra-moral" epoch. In its ideal form, this type of human being would experience the retirement of the "old" morality as an invitation, finally, to affirm without distraction "what was and is," and to do so for "all eternity."[83]

As he proceeds to muse in the following section, those who survive the "sacrifice [of] God for the nothing" eventually may come to regard the long apprenticeship in European Christianity as a childish conceit—i.e., a starter religion—that humankind was obliged to endure and outgrow.[84] Although he does not say so explicitly, we apparently are meant to understand that those who survive the wound inflicted by European Christianity are likely to graduate to a religion, perhaps even a theism, that actually satisfies their "religious instinct."

While the conclusion of the extracted passage is admittedly obscure, Nietzsche may be understood here to be conveying his sense of what religion might become under the aegis of this alternative ideal. The "world-affirming" pessimist he has described shouts *da capo* not only to "himself" and to the

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82 Ibid. Lampert finds the "thought of eternal return" in Sections 56–57 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, and he detects its influence on the remainder of Part Three (*Nietzsche's Task*, pp. 116–23). See also Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 142–43; Burnham, *Reading Nietzsche*, pp. 83–90; Acampora and Ansell Pearson, *Nietzsche's* Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 87–93; and Sommer, *Kommentar*, pp. 357–61.

83 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 68.

84 Ibid., pp. 68–69.

"spectacle" unfolding around him, but also to an unnamed other, who "needs" the spectacle and, therefore, "makes it necessary." In so doing, moreover, this unnamed other reveals that he "needs himself" and, in his efforts to satisfy this need, "makes himself necessary" by staging and renewing the aforementioned spectacle.

That human existence is best understood (and most readily affirmed) as a "play and spectacle" is an idea that Nietzsche consistently associates with the nobles of Greek antiquity, who, he allows, "invented" the Olympian gods to serve as divine (= meaning-conferring) "spectators" of the otherwise unremarkable human condition.[85] The belief that their performance was worthy of a divine audience, even if by merit of their penchant for "folly," was sufficient for the nobles of Greek antiquity to affirm the "spectacle" in which they found themselves emplaced.[86] Grateful for (or desirous of) divine benefaction, and alert in any event to the whims of their Olympian spectators, the noble Greeks held themselves to an elevated standard of human excellence and found ample meaning in having done so.

A similar experience of religion may be implied by the Latin coda that Nietzsche applies to his description of the alternative ideal: *circulus vitiosus deus*.[87] The unnamed other at whom the world-affirming pessimist shouts *da capo*, I suggest, is the god (*deus*) who is responsible for staging and scripting the "spectacle" in question.[88] (We may be reminded here of the defiant figure of Prometheus, who was bound by Zeus to the promontory and tormented on a daily basis by liver-devouring eagles.) On this interpretation, the worthy pessimist demonstrates his positive disposition toward life by demanding that the unnamed god authorize a reprise of his performance, despite knowing (or suspecting) that he has in fact invented the divine spectator(s) for whom he performs. (Hence the vicious circle: the pessimist affirms life because he understands himself to merit the attention of those divine spectators whom he has conjured for the express purpose of attending to the spectacle in which he performs.) Here we may conjecture on Nietzsche's behalf that the pessimist persists in this (viciously circular) experience of religion because he has acknowledged that untruth—in this case, the fiction of the divine

85 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 93–94.

86 Ibid.

87 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 68.

88 According to Nietzsche, the survivors of morality may someday recognize, cheerfully, that the "old morality too is part *of the comedy!*" (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 21–22). The occasion for doing so, he suggests, will be their "discover[y of] a new complication and possibility for the Dionysian drama of 'The Destiny of the Soul'—and one can wager that the grand old eternal comic poet of our existence will be quick to make use of it!" (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 21–22).

spectators—is a condition of life itself.[89] In that event, a circle that is admittedly vicious (i.e., with respect to logic) would be affirmed by the pessimist as life-enhancing.[90]

Notwithstanding this hopeful glimpse of a post-Christian future, Nietzsche cautions that the "sacrifice [of] God for the nothing" augurs a potentially cataclysmic outcome. As he explains, the sole remaining motivation for loving humanity is to do so *not* for the sake of humanity, for which modern science and philosophy find no compelling warrant, but for the sake of God.[91] Nietzsche not only applauds this motivation, inasmuch as it arises from "the noblest and most remote feeling attained among men," but also praises its unnamed, stammering author, who must "remain holy and venerable for us for all time as the human being who has flown highest yet and gone astray most beautifully."[92] While Nietzsche's tender sentiment may surprise some readers, his reasoning should not. Those who have believed and taught that humanity should be loved "for God's sake" may have erred in arriving at this desideratum, but they have succeeded, perhaps unwittingly, in erecting an emergency bulwark against the nihilism that impels the progress of modern philosophy and science. Had we not learned to love humanity "for God's sake," we likely would have already exhausted, with the full approval of modern science and philosophy, our will for the future of humanity. That we are beloved "for God's sake" may no longer be widely credible, but it has bought humanity sufficient time—or so Nietzsche hopes—to survive the coming dark age of European nihilism.

6 The "New" Philosophers

Having exposed "modern philosophers" as unsuspecting nihilists-in-waiting, Nietzsche turns to a consideration of the "new" philosophers whose approach he heralded at the close of Part Two.[93] The big pitch here is his promise that the "new" philosophers will reign in the runaway neurosis by returning religion to its rightful (= subordinate) place in the cultural order of rank.

The proposed demotion of religion should not be regarded as a (strictly) punitive measure. Notwithstanding his popular reputation as the arch-enemy

89 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 12.

90 I am indebted here to Douglas Burnham, "The Suicide and Rebirth of Religion: The third part: 'das religiöse Wesen,'" in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, ed. by Marcus Andreas Born, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2014, pp. 86–89.

91 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 72.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid., pp. 53–56.

of organized religion, Nietzsche acknowledges a positive role for religion within the articulated structure of a thriving culture or society. In order to make this case, he begins with a surprisingly sympathetic appreciation of the benefits we may expect a properly circumscribed religion to confer upon a thriving nation or people. As he explains, religion is best understood as a potentially useful tool or artifice—no less so than the "political" and "economic" resources at hand[94]—in the service of the grander goal of cultural enhancement. If properly managed and contained, in fact, religion presents a ruler or lawgiver with an unusually versatile means of serving (and cultivating) multiple constituencies within a social order or political configuration.

To those contemplative types of "noble descent" who value peaceful solitude, religion grants the desired exemption from the "necessary *dirt* of all politics."[95] To those who one day might rule, religion offers excellent training in the ascetic disciplines required for effective leadership.[96] To those who are "lowliest," finally, religion delivers the pro-social benefits to be wrought from the rigid containment and vigilant management of the "religious neurosis" itself. Demonstrating his appreciation for the contributions of a docile "herd" to the achievement of social cohesion and political stability, Nietzsche expresses his admiration for the emotional delicacy displayed by two well-known religions of decadence:

> Perhaps nothing in Christianity and [Indian] Buddhism is as venerable as their art of teaching even the lowliest how to place themselves through piety in an illusory higher order of things and thus to maintain their contentment with the real order, in which their life is hard enough—and precisely this hardness is necessary.[97]

As he confirms in his next book, religion dispenses comfort and hope to those who have none, and it allows for otherwise agitated or neurotic individuals to become productive members of a functional collective:

> [T]he *formation of the herd* is a significant victory and advance in the struggle against depression. With the growth of the community, a new interest grows for the individual, too, and often lifts him above the most personal element in his discontent, his aversion to *himself*…[98]

94 Ibid., p. 72.
95 Ibid., p. 73.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., pp. 73–74.
98 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 135.

As we shall see, of course, these benefits will accrue once again only in the event that religion is returned to its rightful, subordinate place in the cultural order of rank.

Having made the positive case for religion, Nietzsche turns to make the negative case, offering to expose the "uncanny dangerousness" of those religions that "do *not* want to be a means of education and cultivation in the philosopher's hand."[99] His chief reservation with respect to such religions is that those who typically are appointed to tend the neurotic herd—viz. the priests—cannot be expected, much less trusted, to limit the reach of their ministry. Oblivious to any distinction between those who do and do not need their services, the priests are naturally inclined to tend to sick and healthy souls alike, thereby expanding their dominion until they are compelled to desist.[100] In an observation that intimates the dark extremes of Nietzsche's "immoralism," he accuses these religions of having "preserved too much of what *ought to perish*," by which he means that they have "preserve[d] all that was sick and that suffered."[101]

Narrowing his focus once again, Nietzsche indicts European Christianity for its opposition to the most fundamental aims of culture. By acting on its neurotic presumption of cultural sovereignty, thereby refusing to serve as "a means of education and cultivation," Christianity has in fact produced the *opposite* of a culture: "doesn't it seem that a single will dominated Europe for eighteen centuries—to turn humanity into a *sublime miscarriage*?"[102] The fundamental issue here is that the project of cultural enhancement requires the presiding legislators to attend to the elevation of the culture's greatest exemplars, and to do so at any tolerable expense. Inasmuch as Christianity consistently identifies the "good" man as its supreme product and achievement, it fails at this most basic task of cultural enhancement. As a consequence of this failure, moreover, Christianity also insists on preserving (and devoting scarce resources to) those whom late modern European culture by all rights should have acknowledged as failures.

Lest we think Nietzsche to be unusually hard-hearted and cruel, we should note that he places great stock in the humanitarian character of his attack on the current practice of disregarding (and even disputing) the genuine (= instrumental) "nature" of religion.[103] Underlying his concern here is his observation that the emergent masses, supposedly beloved and nourished by

99 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 74
100 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 139–40.
101 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 75.
102 Ibid.
103 Burnham, "The Suicide and Rebirth of Religion," pp. 70–72.

European Christianity, are actually ill served by its illegitimate assertion of cultural sovereignty. Rather than alleviate the suffering of the poor and dispossessed, e.g., by sorting them into properly managed "herds," European Christianity exacerbates their distress by encouraging in them the full bloom of their uncontained, unmanaged, untreated neurosis. That he expects his readers to consider these champions of religious sovereignty alongside kindred idealists is suggested by his claim that they have endeavored to "stand all valuations *on their head,*"[104] thereby "invert[ing] all love of the earthly and of dominion over the earth into hatred of the earth and the earthly."[105]

Any attempt on Nietzsche's behalf to isolate the *Wesen* of religion must acknowledge both the source of his admiration—viz. the comfort and meaning granted to sufferers within the sheltering context of the "herd"[106]—*and* the source of his reservation—viz. the natural tendency on the part of the priests to extend their ministry and expand their dominion.[107] Since one cannot have religion without priestly supervision—though, to be sure, Nietzsche entertains the idea of declaring the priests to be outcasts[108]—one must rely on the appointed guardians of the order of rank to limit the dominion of the priests (and thereby contain the neurosis they promote). In short: the "new" philosophers will solve the aforementioned "problem" of faith and knowledge by prescribing a balance that promises to quell the agitations of those who suffer while furthering the production and elevation of culture. The role (if any) of the priests in maintaining the prescribed balance remains to be determined by the "new" philosophers.

7 The Calamity of European Christianity

Nietzsche's harrowing conclusion to Part Three of *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which he delivers his summary indictment of Christianity,[109] is likely to leave some of his readers dispirited and disillusioned. At this juncture in the elaboration of his main narrative, the sheer magnitude of the "calamity" in question

104 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 1–3.
105 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 75.
106 Ibid., pp. 72–74.
107 Ibid., pp. 74–76.
108 See, for example, the "fifth proposition" of Nietzsche's "Decree against Christianity," which he may have meant to append to *The Antichrist*.
109 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 74–76. He offers a similar (and similarly scathing) indictment of Christian morality in Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 142–43.

may be received as overwhelming. The appearance on the scene of a mass of "herd animals"—*not* as an unfortunate accident, but as the outcome intended by those who "have so far held sway over the fate of Europe"[110]—may be understood to suggest that the collapse of Western civilization is nigh. Indeed, rather than accept at face value the pieties rehearsed by "sovereign" Christianity, Nietzsche excoriates its apologists and champions for displaying "the most calamitous kind of arrogance yet,"[111] for they have attempted a task to which they are by no means equal.[112]

While Nietzsche's ire is perhaps understandable, he is well aware that the priests (and their secular patrons) are not ultimately at fault for the "calamity" over which they have presided. As any worthwhile lawgiver or ruler understands, the value of the priests, as of religion more generally, depends on a strict monitoring of the bounds within which they and it are allowed to operate. That the priestly type has *become* dangerous, productive of the calamity that Nietzsche reveals and intends to address, should not surprise us, for the constraints on priestly mischief, as on religion more generally, have been relaxed to a dangerous degree in late modernity. The real problem here, to the solution of which Nietzsche intends to rally his best readers, is the dereliction of duty on the part of those who are supposed to curb the enthusiasm of the priests.[113] For that important task, *new* philosophers are needed, philosophers who will observe the order of rank, keep the priests in check, and reclaim the philosopher's prerogative to determine the future of humankind.

Inasmuch as Nietzsche's readers are not the "new" philosophers whom he invokes, what might they realistically hope to contribute? If we may assume that his readers are not (yet) prepared to view "European Christianity with the mocking and aloof eyes of an Epicurean god," and that they are not (yet) in a position to appreciate its "oddly painful and equally crude and subtle comedy,"[114] how are they meant to respond to this calamity? At this juncture in the elaboration of his argument, Nietzsche is content to incite in his readers an intensified feeling of righteous indignation, precisely so that their opposition to Christianity might become more fully (and productively) visceral.

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110 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 76.

111 Ibid., pp. 75–76.

112 As Lampert succinctly puts the decisive point, "When religions reign sovereign, they are 'themselves the final goal.' When philosophy is sovereign, religion is one 'means among other means' to the goal philosophy sets" (Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, p. 131). See also Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 139–141.

113 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 139–40.

114 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 75.

The outrage he invites them to feel and express is apparently catalytic of the affective-somatic transformation he has offered to induce in them. Later on, as we shall see, as their affective-somatic transformation nears its completion, he will prescribe to them the "task" in the performance of which they may channel without reserve the vituperation he has urged them to own.[115]

The symmetry of Nietzsche's claims in Parts Two and Three of *Beyond Good and Evil* will not be lost on his best readers. Just as they were identified in Part Two as better suited (*qua* free spirits) to a lesser (but more immediate) role in the production of a philosophy of the future, so religion has been identified, by virtue of its defining "essence," as better suited to a subordinate, instrumental role in the elevation of culture. In the case of both claims, moreover, an unwarranted assertion of sovereignty has been exposed as both problematic and destructive. The dissolution of order that characterizes late modern European culture has permitted individuals and institutions to expand their dominion in pursuit of a greater (if unearned) share of sovereignty and self-determination. The resulting expansions of dominion, by untested individuals and unworthy institutions, are potentially disastrous for the future of European civilization. Nietzsche thus encourages his best readers to begin the process of reining in these ill-conceived aims at expanded dominion, and to do so precisely by re-asserting the legislative prerogative of philosophy.

At the same time, however, Nietzsche is careful not to overstate the likely contributions of his best readers to the restoration of an order of rank. Just as his best readers are meant to understand themselves as invested in the morality they seek to overturn (Part Two), so too are they meant to see themselves as vulnerable to, and perhaps already afflicted with, the religious "neurosis" they are meant to expose (Part Three). It is Nietzsche's intention, in other words, to place himself and his best readers squarely "in the zone of the disease" they are determined to treat.[116] And although this placement will complicate their plans, obliging them to adjust their expectations accordingly, it is only in the "zone of the disease" that they will find the optimal experience of freedom and power that is available to them. Having acknowledged within themselves the neurotic wish to declare their independence and assert their claim to sovereignty, they will be prepared to fulfil this wish when called and authorized to do so. With any luck, their collective efforts should suffice to disabuse

115 Ibid., pp. 159–62.

116 I borrow this term from Yovel, who coined it to account for the likelihood of the infection of Nietzsche's "anti-anti-Semitism" with the disease of anti-Semitism (Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews*, University Park, PA: Penn State Press 1998, pp. 120–23).

Europeans for centuries to come of the dangers associated with any religion that is permitted (and even encouraged) to assert a neurotic claim to cultural sovereignty.

What Nietzsche has not yet revealed to his best readers is that he regards the recent emergence of a mass of European "herd animals" as both a calamity *and* an opportunity. As he will proceed to explain in later sections of *Beyond Good and Evil*, something may yet be done for and with "the European of today,"[117] especially if the philosophers of the future share his commitment to a grand project of cultural renewal. In subsequent Parts of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche will respond to this calamity by envisioning an "extra-moral" or "tragic" culture, in which humankind is emboldened to assume control of (and responsibility for) the process of producing, as a matter of volition and design, those exotic, norm-averse human beings who body forth a justification of our mortal, worldly existence.

8 Conclusion

In addition to being potentially disappointed once again by their demotion in status, Nietzsche's readers may have other, potentially larger concerns. Having confirmed that the genuine "essence" or "nature" of religion lies in its use, as a tool of discipline and control, by philosophers (*qua* lawgivers) in their efforts to promote the cause of cultural enhancement, Nietzsche may have given his readers reason to suspect *his* motives with respect to them. If morality and religion are accorded no sovereign (or non-instrumental) status, if the presiding lawgivers are entitled to lie and deceive in their efforts to advance the cause of cultural enhancement, then why should Nietzsche's readers trust *him*—especially now that he has urged them to take up a lesser, preliminary role in the production of a philosophy of the future? As a self-avowed "immoralist," after all, Nietzsche has pledged to do and say virtually anything that may contribute to the realization of the worthy ends he envisions. If he condones the strategic use and manipulation of morality and religion, why should his best readers expect him to treat them fairly and honestly?

If they are led by such questions to direct a healthier measure of suspicion toward the various claims that Nietzsche makes about them and on their behalf, establishing for themselves the truth of what he says, they may be well on their way toward becoming the companions he claims to seek. If they are

117 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 76.

to be of use to him in contributing to the production of a philosophy of the future, and to the return of philosophy to its rightful legislative function, they will need to treat *his* authority with the same intensity of skepticism that he has urged them to show to other figures of supposed authority.[118] This may be a difficult lesson for his readers to master, but the difficulty involved is apparently a faithful reflection of the urgency of the task he has reserved for them. As we shall see, they must arrive of their own volition at the potentially dispiriting determinations—e.g., of role, station, agency, and freedom—that he has urged them to consider. Indeed, we are perhaps reminded here of Zarathustra's valedictory admonition at the close of his first extended adventure:

> You say you believe in Zarathustra? But what matters Zarathustra? You are my believers? You had not yet sought yourselves: and you found me. Thus do all believers; therefore all faith amounts to so little. Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.[119]

As we know, Zarathustra was unable to fulfil his end of this bargain, which is why he was obliged to resume his journey of self-discovery in Part II and beyond. Will Nietzsche fare any better in his efforts to educating disciples who eventually must disown the practice of discipleship?

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118 See Marcus Andreas Born, "Perspectives on a Philosophy of the Future in Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*," in *Nietzsche's Free Spirit Philosophy*, ed. by Rebecca Bamford, London: Rowman & Littlefield International 2015, pp. 163–165.

119 Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Viking Penguin, 1982, p. 190.

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CHAPTER 13

Religious Philosophy in the Shadow of Communism: The Story of Kierkegaard Translations

Peter Šajda

Abstract

The chapter presents a case study illustrating the tension between religious philosophy and the programmatically atheistic system of communism. The rise of communism in the twentieth century had a substantial impact on the international reception of Søren Kierkegaard's religious philosophy. In Communist countries Kierkegaard was generally viewed with suspicion and translation of his works into national languages was discouraged. Some translation traditions were interrupted for long periods of time, others were considerably weakened, still others could be initiated only after the fall of communism. Despite communist efforts to suppress translations of Kierkegaard, the 1990s saw an astounding resurgence of translation activity across the post-communist world. The enduring interest in Kierkegaard's exploration of authentic religious existence is a testimony to the relevance of this philosophical issue for modernity.

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In this chapter I present a case study illustrating the tension between religious philosophy and the programmatically atheistic system of communism. The modern age has brought about numerous attempts to establish a communist social order in which religion would be criticized, marginalized and ultimately eliminated. Marxism-Leninism was used in different ways to replace "outdated" religious philosophies. Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy, which comprises an in-depth exploration of existential religion, was viewed with intense suspicion. Due to its emphasis on the religious self-formation of the single individual it seemed clearly antithetical to the communist cause. It was thus in the interest of communist regimes to limit or even halt the dissemination of Kierkegaard's writings. In this way translating Kierkegaard became a political issue. The communist world of the twentieth century was, however, far from monolithic. There were periods and places in which censorship was extremely strict, but there were others, in which it was relatively lenient. Moreover, the multiperspectivity of Kierkegaard's authorship—in which pseudonymous

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and non-pseudonymous works form a complex whole—enabled translators to choose "less problematic" parts in which the religious perspective was not at the forefront. My aim is to show how the existence of communist regimes in Europe and Asia affected traditions of translating Kierkegaard into national languages. Although substantial attention has been paid in recent years to the reception of Kierkegaard in philosophy, theology, psychology and literature, analyses of translation traditions are limited and scarce.[1] This is largely due to the fact that until recently comprehensive bibliographies of translations covering a broader spectrum of languages were not available. In 2016–2017 I co-edited with Jon Stewart the seven-volume *Kierkegaard Bibliography* which maps Kierkegaard reception in forty languages and represents the most extensive reference work of its kind. It contains detailed bibliographies of translations of Kierkegaard into the different languages, but due to its bibliographical character this work does not analyze or compare them. In this article I present an analysis and a comparison of the individual translation traditions.[2] First, I will focus on the translation traditions in the Free World which were not subject to communist censorship. Next, I will examine the translation traditions that developed behind the Iron Curtain. Finally, I will evaluate the overall impact of communism on the propagation of Kierkegaard's philosophy through translations into the languages of the world.

1 In 1998 the *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* started publishing a series of papers focusing on Kierkegaard reception in individual languages. While most attention was paid to history of ideas, some attention was devoted to translation traditions, too. See, for example, Ulrich Lincoln, "Literaturbericht: *Der Liebe Tun* in der deutschsprachigen Kierkegaard-Forschung," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 1998, pp. 213–231; Álvaro L.M. Valls, "*The Concept of Anxiety* in Spanish and Portuguese," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2001, pp. 335–340; Jon Stewart, "The Reception of Kierkegaard's *Nachlass* in the English-Speaking World," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2003, pp. 277–315; Jacques Lafarge, "L'Édition des Œuvres complètes de Kierkegaard en français: contexte - historique - objectifs - conception – réalisation," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2000, pp. 300–316. It is also worth mentioning that the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center in Copenhagen actively promoted extensive translation projects, such as *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, *Deutsche Søren Kierkegaard Edition* and *Søren Kierkegaard Művei*.

2 See Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tomes I–VII, London and New York: Routledge 2016–2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19). I develop in this chapter the ideas I presented in my article "Medzi kultúrou a politikou. O prekladoch Kierkegaarda do jazykov sveta," *Ostium*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1–12. My analysis is based on the status quo of the research.

1 The Development of Translation Traditions in the Free World

The first translations of Kierkegaard originated in the cultural-linguistic contexts that were closest to his native Danish context. Although a large part of the Scandinavian literary world of the nineteenth century could read Danish without difficulty, Kierkegaard's writings were first translated into Scandinavian languages for the sake of fluent reception. A fragment of a Kierkegaardian text appeared in Norwegian as early as 1846, but this was rather a rarity, since the contemporary literary Norwegian differed minimally from Danish. Norwegian translations appeared in a larger number in the twentieth century, when Kierkegaard's language became less familiar for the common Norwegian reader. Major works started to appear in the 1960s with translation activity intensifying in the 1990s and especially after 2000.[3] A different situation arose in Sweden, whose language differed more markedly from Danish. In the 1850s nearly twenty translations were published, a significant part of these during Kierkegaard's lifetime.[4] In the subsequent decades the publication of Kierkegaard's key works continued. Collections of Kierkegaard's texts were published in 1916, 1934–1937, 1954–1957, 1963, 1970 and 2013. Major works experienced several translations throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with intense translation activity taking place also in the recent decades.[5] The Icelandic reading public of the nineteenth century was well-acquainted with Danish, since Iceland was part of the Kingdom of Denmark. Icelandic translations thus appeared first in the twentieth century, most frequently in the 1960s and in the last three decades.[6] Finland was in the nineteenth century part of the Russian Empire but cultivated lively cultural relations with other Nordic countries. First minor translations of Kierkegaard were published in 1898, and then larger texts began to appear in the first decades of the twentieth century. The Finnish translation tradition proceeded at a relatively slow pace but was never artificially interrupted.[7]

3 Siv F. Berg and Øivind Berg, "Norwegian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 11–12.

4 Matthew T. Nowachek and Joseph Ballan, "Swedish," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 197–198.

5 Ibid., pp. 199–203.

6 Kristian Guttesen, "Icelandic," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome IV, *Hungarian to Korean*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 23.

7 Janne Kylliäinen, "Finnish," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome III, *Estonian to Hebrew*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 3–4.

The Germanophone milieu, in which first translation appeared in the 1860s, has been crucial for both the European and the global Kierkegaard reception. In the nineteenth century twenty German translations were published including most of Kierkegaard's key works. On the basis of some of these, the publisher Eugen Diederichs initiated the edition of *Gesammelte Werke* (1909–1922) which substantially influenced the German intellectual discourse and contributed to the "Kierkegaard Renaissance."[8] This edition was used by trendsetting authors in contemporary philosophy, theology, psychology and literature. It became an important point of orientation for subsequent Italian, American, Korean, and Japanese translations.[9] A distinctive feature of the German translation tradition was the ideological struggle between translators who interpreted Kierkegaard's thought in contrary ways. The issue at the heart of the controversy was the relation of Kierkegaard's thought to traditional Christian dogmatics. The translators accompanied Kierkegaard's works with forewords and afterwords in which they advocated their views and argued against their opponents. The main representatives of the "right" apologetic line were Albert Bärthold and Theodor Haecker, the "left" anti-Christian line was represented primarily by Christoph Schrempf. The latter's translations became a target of criticism from a translatological point of view, too. Schrempf made arbitrary changes to Kierkegaard's texts,[10] for which he was heavily criticized by Emanuel Hirsch, who became a key figure in the later stages of the German translation tradition. In the second half of the twentieth century an important role was played by the twenty-seven volume edition *Gesammelte Werke* (1950–1969) which Hirsch co-edited with Hayo Gerdes and Hans Martin Junghans. This edition was reprinted in 1986–1995 and experienced several later editions.[11] In 2005 the eleven-volume *Deutsche Søren Kierkegaard Edition* was initiated.

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8 Eva Kaminski, Gerhard Schreiber and Heiko Schulz, "German," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome III, *Estonian to Hebrew*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 59–61. "Kierkegaard Renaissance" was a contemporary term referring to the great wave of interest in Kierkegaard in German intellectual circles in the interwar period. I analyze this phenomenon in my book *Kierkegaardovská renesancia. Filozofia, náboženstvo, politika*, Bratislava: Premedia 2016.

9 Gerhard Schreiber, "Christoph Schrempf: The 'Swabian Socrates' as Translator of Kierkegaard," in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology*, Tome I, *German Protestant Theology*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2012 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 10), pp. 296–297.

10 Cf. ibid., pp. 297–306.

11 Kaminski, Schreiber and Schulz, "German," p. 66. I pay closer attention to the polemic between the translators in *Kierkegaardovská renesancia. Filozofia, náboženstvo, politika*, pp. 29–40.

The Dutch translation tradition was started in the 1880s when several translations appeared in the journal *Stemmen voor Waarheid en Vrede.* These were followed by translations of minor works in book form. The line of Dutch translations has been characterized by an astonishing continuity until the present.[12]

Translations into Romance languages began to appear in the twentieth century with the exception of the French translation of the treatise *On the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle* by Johannes Gøtzsche, which appeared in 1886 in both Paris and Copenhagen. The next French translation was published in 1929 at a time when both Germany and France experienced their own versions of the Kierkegaard Renaissance. In the 1930s a large wave of new translations emerged with prominent translators Jean Jacques Gateau, Knud Ferlov and Paul-Henri Tisseau appearing on the scene. The wave continued throughout World War II. Between 1954 and 1961 a five-volume edition of Kierkegaard's journals appeared, followed by a twenty-volume edition *Oeuvres Complètes* in 1966–1986. The latter was produced mainly by Tisseau and completed postmortem by his daughter Else-Marie Jacquet-Tisseau, who became a translator in her own right. She was responsible for a new edition of Kierkegaard's journals and papers launched in 2007.[13]

Although Italian translations appeared later than the first French translation, they formed a continuous wave in 1907. In the 1930s the number of new Italian translations was significantly lower than that of French translations, but this began to change in the 1940s when Cornelio Fabro entered the scene. Between 1948 and 1951 he produced a three-volume edition of Kierkegaard's journals which he expanded to a twelve-volume edition in 1980–1983. He translated a broad variety of Kierkegaard's works and published selections from them in 1972 and 1979–1982. In 1995 he prepared a three-volume anthology entitled *Opere*. Italian anthologies have covered a narrower range of Kierkegaard's writings than their French counterparts.[14]

The Portuguese translation tradition was in its early stages more modest than other Romance language traditions, but it originated earlier than the neighboring Spanish one. There were substantial gaps between the early Portuguese

12 Karel T. Eisses. "Dutch," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome I, *Afrikaans to Dutch*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 155–161.

13 Leo Stan and Jon Stewart, "French," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome III, *Estonian to Hebrew*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 7–12.

14 Laura Liva, "Italian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome IV, *Hungarian to Korean*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 27–35.

translations: the first appeared in 1911, the second in 1936 and the third in 1951. In the late 1950s and early 1960s a continuous wave of translations emerged with an active participation of the Brazilian literary milieu. In the 1970s two anthologies of Kierkegaard's writings were published. Since the second half of the 1980s numerous translations have been published both in Portugal and Brazil.[15]

The first Spanish translation appeared in Madrid in 1918. Although other translations followed in the 1920s and 1930s, no greater wave of translations was formed. The number of translations increased in the 1940s and 1950s partly due to the contributions from the Argentinian and Mexican literary circles. A nine-part anthology of Kierkegaard's works and journals was published in 1961–1969 in Madrid. In the subsequent decades diverse translations continued to appear in Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia with new collections of Kierkegaard's works and journals published after 2000.[16]

In the Anglophone world the first translations of Kierkegaard appeared in the 1920s and 1930s.[17] They were published in the United States and American publishers have ever since played a dominant role in the English translation tradition. This tradition comprises several prominent translators who have left a substantial literary legacy. Walter Lowrie translated ten works by Kierkegaard in 1939–1941, including the large works *Stages on Life's Way* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Lowrie collaborated repeatedly with David F. Swenson, who was an important translator in his own right. In 1962 Swenson co-authored a translation of *Philosophical Fragments* with Howard V. Hong. Thus began a long line of translations produced by the latter, who often worked together with his wife Edna H. Hong. Between 1967 and 1978 the Hongs published an influential edition of Kierkegaard's journals and papers.[18] They went on to produce numerous translations which were integrated into the twenty-six-volume edition of *Kierkegaard's Writings*. Alastair Hannay's translations began to appear in the 1980s and are also widely used. Princeton

15 Marcio G. de Paula, Elisabete M. de Sousa and Humberto A. Q. de Souza, "Portuguese," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 71–73.

16 Nassim Bravo, Dolors P. Vidal and Óscar P. Oubiña, "Spanish," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 151–155.

17 Luke Johnson, Katalin Nun, Jamie Turnbull and Jon Stewart, "English," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome II, *English*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 1–6.

18 *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vols. 1–6, trans. and ed. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press 1967–1978.

University Press has been involved in publishing Kierkegaard translations since the 1930s and remains a key player today. Following World War II the importance of the English translation tradition has grown continuously, and at present it is the most influential tradition that makes Kierkegaard's thought accessible to a global readership.

An extensive translation tradition developed in Japan where the first translation appeared in 1925. The 1930s brought about an intense translation activity: several key works and the first anthology of Kierkegaard's works were published. Editions of collected works proved to be more popular in Japan than elsewhere. In 1948–1949 a thirteen-volume edition was published, in 1962–1968 a twenty-two-volume edition, in 1979–1983 a nine-volume edition and in 1988–2011 a fifteen-volume edition.[19] Other editions of collected works have been published without being completed.

The Korean tradition has developed dynamically since the second half of the 1950s. By 1970 a dozen translations were published, mostly entire works of Kierkegaard. The intensity of publishing grew even stronger in the 1970s.[20] At present Korean readers have at their disposal several translations of all the key writings of Kierkegaard.

In the Islamic world translations of Kierkegaard first appeared in Turkey. The 1970s and 1980s saw the publication of minor texts, but after 1990 the number of entire works increased.[21] The first major translations in Arabic appeared in the 1980s.[22]

2 Translation Traditions behind the Iron Curtain

The rise of communism in the twentieth century had a demonstrable impact on both the European and the Asian receptions of Kierkegaard. Some translation traditions were interrupted for a considerable period of time, others were

19 Yusuke Suzuki, "Japanese," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome IV, *Hungarian to Korean*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 97–105.

20 Jae-myeong Pyo and Min-Ho Lee, "Korean," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome IV, *Hungarian to Korean*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 179–181.

21 Türker Armaner, "Turkish," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 235.

22 Faezeh Moieni, "Arabic," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome I, *Afrikaans to Dutch*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 5.

substantially weakened, and still others could be initiated only after the fall of communism. While communist regimes shared a number of features, they also developed local characteristics. Kierkegaard as a religious philosopher was generally viewed with suspicion, but the intensity of this suspicion depended on the atmosphere of the given context. In this section I focus on the effect of the communist rule on individual translation traditions.

Russian was among the first languages—and the first Slavic language—into which Kierkegaard was translated. The Russian translation tradition predates all the Romance language traditions as well as the English tradition. The earliest Russian translation of "The Balance between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality" from *Either/Or* was published by Peter Hansen in 1885. It was followed by other fragments from the same work in 1886, 1894, 1908 and 1912.[23] The Russian bibliography lists as the next item yet another fragment from *Either/Or* in 1967. Thus, for more than half a century no translation of Kierkegaard was published. This long hiatus coincides largely with the era of Leninist and Stalinist leveling of cultural life. Before the onset of the perestroika promoted by Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, only four short translations of Kierkegaard appeared in Soviet Russia. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, a series of Kierkegaard's crucial works was published within a decade: *The Sickness unto Death*, *Fear and Trembling*, *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Repetition*. Kierkegaard's largest works, *Either/Or* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, were published after 2000.[24] New translations as well as new editions of older translations continue to appear to this day.

Bibliographies of the Kierkegaard reception in the Baltic countries and Ukraine—which were part of the Soviet Union until 1990 or 1991—show the strong impact of communism, too. In Estonian the earliest translation of a selection from *Christian Discourses* appeared in 1938. No translation was published during the Soviet era. The translation activity picks up again in the second half of the 1990s and yields admirable results. Between 1998 and 2008 *Fear and Trembling*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Concept of Anxiety* as well as fragments of other works are published.[25] Lithuanian is the only Baltic language in which a translation of Kierkegaard appeared during

23 Darya Loungina, "Russian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 111. Some selections from *Either/Or* were republished in 1914.

24 Ibid., pp. 111–115.

25 Mikael Munk Lyshede, "Estonian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome III, *Estonian to Hebrew*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 1.

the Soviet rule. A selection from *Either/Or* was published in 1974. Similar to Estonian, a lively translation activity unfolds from the mid-1990s. In quick sequence *Fear and Trembling*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, *The Sickness unto Death*, and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* were published by various Vilnius-based publishing houses.[26] Latvian translations have been the latest to appear. *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death* were published in 2010 and 2013 respectively. No Ukrainian translation appeared during communism, and the translation activity only began in the 1990s.[27]

Before examining Central European languages, some of which have an extensive tradition of Kierkegaard translations, let us turn our attention to Eastern and Southeastern European languages. The Romanian bibliography lists no translations prior to 1992. The barren era of communist censorship is followed by "an explosion" of translation activity in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Within a decade *Practice in Christianity*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Repetition*, *Fear and Trembling* and numerous fragments of other works were published.[28] The frantic translation activity reflects an apparent thirst for philosophy that was previously dismissed as "reactionary" or "outdated" by the official ideology.

The Bulgarian translation tradition begins with "Diapsalmata" and "The Unhappiest One" in 1914 and 1920, both of which are popular fragments from *Either/Or*. During the four-decade-long communist rule only a single translation appeared in 1987. The collapse of communism was followed by a marked upswing of translation and publication activity. Between 1991 and 1994 translations of seven important works were launched: *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *The Concept of Irony*, and *Practice in Christianity*.[29]

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26 Jolita A. Pons, "Lithuanian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 5.

27 Viestarts Vidins, "Latvian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 1; Sergij Shevchenko, "Ukrainian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 239.

28 Nicolae Irina, "Romanian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 107–108.

29 Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart, "Bulgarian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome I, *Afrikaans to Dutch*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkeg-*

It is no surprise that the officially atheist Albania—ruled until 1985 by the hardline dictator Enver Hoxha—did not constitute fertile ground for Kierkegaard translations. The first translation of *The Concept of Anxiety* only appeared as late as 2002.[30]

An interruption of continuity, although to a lesser extent than in heavily sovietized contexts, can be seen in the Polish translation tradition, too. It was initiated in 1899, and similar to the Russian tradition it predates most Romance language traditions as well as the English one. Early Polish translations were published at a time when no Polish state existed and the Polish cultural realm spanned across several countries. Some of these translations appeared both in Warsaw and Lvov, thus making Kierkegaard's works available to sizeable Polish minorities in Russia and Austria-Hungary. Fragments of *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *The Moment* were published in this way in 1907 and 1914. Translation activity continued after the re-establishment of the Polish state, but it was interrupted between 1938 and 1960 under the Nazi and Communist dictatorships. In the 1960s a large wave of Polish translations emerged which included the poet and cultural attaché of the Polish Embassy in Copenhagen, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. His translations of *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death* from 1966 received wide acclaim.[31] In 1976 Iwaszkiewicz co-authored a translation of *Either/Or* with Karol Toeplitz. The latter made his debut a year earlier with a large selection of Kierkegaard's writings. Toeplitz' translation activity expanded in the subsequent years with *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Moment*, the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and several minor works. Between 1960 and 1990 a number of crucial works and two anthologies of Kierkegaard's works were published.[32] Although Communist Poland officially subscribed to the Marxist-Leninist view of religion, its anti-religious policies were less strict than in most Eastern Bloc countries. The atmosphere in Poland was more favorable for Kierkegaard translations not only in comparison

aard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, vol. 19), pp. 11–12.

30 Gjergji Pendavinji, "Albanian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome I, *Afrikaans to Dutch*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 3.

31 Antoni Szwed, "Poland: A Short History of the Reception of Kierkegaard's Thought," in Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's International Reception*, Tome II, *Southern, Central and Eastern Europe*, Farnham: Ashgate 2009 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 8), p. 217.

32 Wojciech Kaftański, Jacek A. Prokopski, Antoni Szwed and Karol Toeplitz, "Polish," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 35–38.

with the Soviet Union and the hardline regimes of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe but also in comparison with the neighboring Czechoslovakia.

The line of Czech translations began as early as 1906, and until the outbreak of World War II six texts by Kierkegaard were published. These were popular fragments from *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling* and *Stages on Life's Way*, as well as some minor texts. Between 1948 and 1989 the Czech literary milieu was subject to ideological homogenization. A notable exception was the Prague Spring and its aftermath in 1968–1969, during which a fragment of Kierkegaard's *A Literary Review*—dealing with the topical issue of leveling—was published. Apart from this text, only "The Seducer's Diary" and two short spiritual reflections appeared. The most prolific Czech translator Marie Mikulová Thulstrupová lived in emigration, mostly in Denmark. In 1981 her translations of *The Sickness unto Death* and *Fear and Trembling* appeared in Munich. The situation changed dramatically after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, when translations of several key works by Kierkegaard were published and the publication tempo even accelerated after 2000.[33] Mikulová Thulstrupová authored most of the major translations of Kierkegaard's works and journals.

The only translation available in Slovak during the communist period was a fragment of "The Seducer's Diary" which appeared during the political "thaw" in 1968. A few short translations were published in 1989 and 1990, but the complete translations of *Fear and Trembling*, *Either/Or* and *The Sickness unto Death* were first produced in the new millenium.[34]

Hungary enjoyed in the 1970s and 1980s a higher measure of intellectual freedom than Czechoslovakia, which was beneficial for Kierkegaard translations. The Hungarian literary community encountered Kierkegaard first through two translations published in 1929 in the Lutheran center of southern Hungary, Békéscsaba. Two collections of fragments from Kierkegaard's works were published in the 1960s.[35] Complete translations of *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling* appeared in 1978 and 1986 respectively. Such literary events were hardly imaginable in most Communist countries. Nonetheless, the Hungarian literary world experienced a similar level of enthusiasm for Kierkegaard in the 1990s

33 Kateřina Marková, "Czech," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome I, *Afrikaans to Dutch*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 45–47.

34 Zuzana Blažeková and Peter Šajda, "Slovak," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 129.

35 Judith Bartha and István Czakó, "Hungarian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome IV, *Hungarian to Korean*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 1.

as other post-communist milieus. An unprecedented number of new translations, including *The Sickness unto Death*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Repetition*, *Philosophical Fragments* and *Practice in Christianity*, was published in Budapest.[36]

The freest intellectual atmosphere was to be found in Yugoslavia, where an extensive publication of Croatian and Serbian translations took place between 1974 and 1984. The first fragments of Kierkegaard's works were published in the second half of the 1950s in Zagreb. From 1974 Milan Tabaković produced in quick sequence the translations of *The Sickness unto Death*, *Repetition*, *Either/Or*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Book on Adler*, *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*, as well as selections from other works and journals. However, Tabaković's translations were not based on the Danish original but on German translations. Other translators contributed with *Fear and Trembling* and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*.[37] In contrast to other post-communist countries, Croatia and Serbia did not experience intensive translation activity in the 1990s, which was probably due to the large stock of existing translations and the war in their territories.

Two short translations were published in Slovenian in the 1920s, followed by other small fragments of Kierkegaard's works in the 1960s and 1970s. Translation activity gained momentum in the mid-1980s, and by the time Slovenia became independent in 1991, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Three Upbuilding Discourses* (1843), *Repetition*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, and numerous fragments had been published. Lively translation activity continues to this day.[38]

Macedonian belongs to those languages in which Kierkegaard translations appeared only after the collapse of communism. Two different translations of "The Seducer's Diary" from *Either/Or* were published in 1996 and 2014.[39]

When examining the situation in Asia the peculiar development of the Chinese translation tradition becomes obvious. The period after World War II brought about intensive translation activity in the Japanese and Korean literary circles. Chinese translations began to appear in the 1960s with *The*

36 Ibid., pp. 1–3.

37 Hrvoje Barić, "Croatian, Serbian and Serbo-Croatian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome I, *Afrikaans to Dutch*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 39.

38 Primož Repar, "Slovenian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 143–145.

39 Trajce Stojanov, "Macedonian," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome V, *Latvian to Ukrainian*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), p. 9.

Concept of Anxiety, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Fear and Trembling*, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* and a number of selections published by the end of the decade. Lively translation activity continued in the 1970s. Before 1990, however, no translation was published in mainland China, nearly all were published in Taiwan, some in Hong Kong. The situation changed in 1992, when the first translations appeared in Beijing and Shanghai. The subsequent years saw translations published both in mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, but those from mainland China were dominant. Multi-volume anthologies of Kierkegaard's works were produced only by Beijing-based publishers in the 1990s and after 2000.[40]

With regard to the Korean context, it is important to note that all the known translations have been published in South Korea. There is no evidence of translations appearing in the communist North.

A frequent phenomenon in the literary milieus exposed to communist censorship was the translators' preference for Kierkegaard's "aesthetic writings," especially popular parts of *Either/Or*. These texts do not have an explicitly religious character, and thus they seemed more acceptable in societies that officially subscribed to atheism. Although Kierkegaard himself considered them integral parts of his literary project aimed at a renewal of Christianity his intention is not immediately evident.

The translators were much less inclined to submit for publication Kierkegaard's writings that are clearly intended for the religious formation of the single individual. Some of these include a reference to Christianity in their title—such as *Practice in Christianity* and *Christian Discourses*—or in their subtitle, such as *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening* and *Works of Love: Some Christian Deliberations in the Form of Discourses.* It was also to be expected that communist censors would disapprove of works that focused heavily on biblical texts—such as *Fear and Trembling* and *Upbuilding Discourses*—or dealt with issues of Christian theology, such as *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*.

An interesting case is Kierkegaard's prayers that were first published in a separate volume by Paul-Henri Tisseau in 1937.[41] They were selected from different writings of Kierkegaard. This became a popular genre in the international

40 Qi Wang and Chingshun J. Sheu, "Chinese," in Peter Šajda and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Kierkegaard Bibliography*, Tome I, *Afrikaans to Dutch*, London and New York: Routledge 2017 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 19), pp. 23–25.

41 Stan and Stewart, "French," p. 8.

reception, and other translators followed in Tisseau's footsteps. In 1951 Cornelio Fabro published an Italian edition of Kierkegaard's prayers, which was republished in 1953, 1963 and 1979.[42] In 1956 an English edition was produced by Perry D. LeFevre, which also saw several new editions. It was later translated into Korean.[43] A Dutch collection of Kierkegaard's prayers was published by Wim R. Scholtens in 1976.[44] Although a publication of a large collection of Kierkegaard's prayers would be unacceptable in a standard communist context, small instances of this genre appeared behind the Iron Curtain. A one-page Czech translation entitled "From the Prayers of Søren Kierkegaard" evaded censorship in 1958, when it was published in the journal *Křesťanská revue*. In 1987 a five-page text entitled "A Prayer" was published in the Slovenian journal *Celovški zvon*, and in 1989 a one-page fragment with the same title appeared in the Slovak *Cirkevné listy*.[45] Larger editions of Kierkegaard's prayers were published in Polish in 2007 and Hungarian in 2011.[46]

3 The Overall Impact of Communism on Translation Traditions

Although the translation traditions in the Free World have experienced rising and ebbing waves of intensity, there have been no "artificial" interruptions caused by ideological censorship. There were periods of enthusiasm during which Kierkegaard's thought seemed to be particularly relevant in a given context or even a larger international "Kierkegaard Renaissance" was underway. An important positive impulse was the emergence of translators who devoted a substantial—often long-term—effort to promoting Kierkegaard's intellectual legacy. The absence of such personalities, the lack of enthusiasm for Kierkegaard's philosophy, or the saturation of the translation market had an adverse effect on translation activity. No state-imposed ideological obstacles, however, prevented it from increasing promptly when conditions changed. Significant differences between the individual translation traditions could be seen based on the size of the languages, cultural contexts and internal dynamics, but also smaller languages showed lively and continuous translation activity.

42 Liva, "Italian," p. 29.
43 Johnson, Nun, Turnbull and Stewart, "English," p. 3; Pyo and Lee, "Korean," p. 181.
44 Eisses, "Dutch," p. 157.
45 Marková, "Czech," p. 45; Repar, "Slovenian," p. 143; Blažeková and Šajda, "Slovak," p. 129.
46 Kaftański, Prokopski, Szwed and Toeplitz, "Polish," p. 39; Bartha and Czakó, "Hungarian," p. 3.

The impact of ideologically motivated censorship has been clearly demonstrated. Kierkegaard's philosophical emphasis on authentic religious existence made him an obvious target of communist censorship. In times of intense ideologization it was impossible to publish his writings. Existing translation traditions were interrupted for decades, and new ones could not be initiated. The strictest censorship coincided with the large-scale attempts at leveling cultural life in the Stalinist Soviet Union, Maoist China, Hoxhaist Albania, or Ceaușescu-led Romania. In some cases translation traditions developed in exile. Political reforms that reduced ideological pressure created windows of opportunity in which new translations were published. The discontinuation of the reforms led to periods of "normalization."

In the communist countries of the post-Stalinist era, Kierkegaard translations appeared infrequently and were mostly fragments without explicit religious content. There was little development in the Soviet Union before the perestroika, but in Central Europe the extent of sovietization varied greatly, which had a substantial impact on the dissemination of Kierkegaard's writings. In the 1970s and 1980s the differences between the countries increased dramatically. While Czechoslovakia was subject to consistent ideological leveling, Hungary, Poland, and especially Yugoslavia showed much greater intellectual openness. In the latter a translation tradition comparable to Western standards developed and the Polish tradition showed signs of considerable vitality, too. Although the Hungarian cultural milieu endured tougher restrictions, it managed to produce results that were unimaginable in most communist contexts. In all these countries entire works of Kierkegaard were published, some of them explicitly discussing biblical and theological topics.

The 1990s brought about an immense wave of new translations across the post-communist world. Even the still communist China permitted the publication of a broad variety of Kierkegaard's writings. In some languages these writings appeared for the first time, in others a stifled tradition was revived, and in yet others an already lively tradition was strengthened. With the exception of Croatian and Serbian—in which much of Kierkegaard's *oeuvre* already existed—the general tendency was to gradually translate as many works of Kierkegaard as possible. In most languages this process is still ongoing.

It has been demonstrated that communist regimes consistently undermined Kierkegaard translations. The fate of these translations illustrates as *pars pro toto* the larger phenomenon of communist systematic struggle against religious philosophy. This phenomenon represents an important chapter in the development of religious thought in the Modern Age. The enduring interest in Kierkegaard's exploration of authentic religious existence is a testimony to the relevance of this philosophical issue for modernity.

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CHAPTER 14

Humanity as a New Image of the Divine Absoluteness

Alžbeta Kuchtová

Abstract

In the chapter I propose to describe the link between the concept of alterity and the concept of absoluteness. These concepts are connected in the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas, and this raises some important questions regarding the concept of alterity. The concept of alterity could be applied in environmental ethics, and it might lead to a solution to some of the problems in this field, but only under the condition that alterity not be necessarily linked with absoluteness, which creates hierarchy and privilege. The chapter will analyze in detail the text '*In Image of God', according to Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner* and show the consequences it has for the ethics of alterity. We will also discuss Derrida's criticism of Levinas concerning the relation of divinity to alterity, especially the text "Violence and Metaphysics." The chapter will also criticize Catherine Chalier's interpretation of Levinas and her book *L'alliance avec la nature*, where she explains the role of nature in Judaism. The broader goal of the text will be to prove that metaphysical hierarchy is an obstacle to environmental philosophy.

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There are several works dedicated to the possibility of developing environmental philosophy based on the work by Emmanuel Levinas. The anthology *Facing Nature: Levinas and Environmental Thought* collects a number of essays by different authors who ask questions concerning the alterity of nature.[1] This book explores the possibility of putting Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy within the scope of ecological thought. It suggests several interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas' works which prove fruitful for environmental thinking, or they at least prove that his work is not in contradiction with environmental thinking. Some interpretations in this volume go beyond Levinas' thinking, such as that of Edward F. Mooney and Lyman F. Mower in "Witness to the Face of a River:

1 William Edelglass, James Hatley, Christian Diehm (ed.), *Facing Nature: Lévinas and Environmental Thought*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 2012.

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Thinking with Levinas and Thoreau."[2] They seek to show that the notion of a face may also be attributed to natural artifacts such as a river. It contains texts on animality in Levinas; for example, in "Facing Animals,"[3] Peter Atterton deduces that the consequences of Levinas' philosophy make it possible to extend the field of alterity as far as the alterity of animals since animals suffer as well, although the philosopher refutes the idea of an animal having a face.

However, Jacques Derrida criticized Emmanuel Levinas' concept of alterity in his book *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, which is based on animal ethics.[4] We will focus on his criticism in this text. In "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida says,

> If one does not follow Levinas when he affirms that the things offered to work or to desire—in the Hegelian sense: for example, natural objectivity—belong to the ego, to the ego's economy (to the same), and do not offer the absolute resistance *reserved for other* (*Others*); if one is tempted to think that this last resistance supposes, in its innermost meaning, the possibility of *resistance of things—the existence of the world which is not myself and in which I am, in as original a way as one may wish, for example as the origin of the world within the world*, although it is not to be confused with this possibility; if one does not follow Levinas when he affirms that the true resistance to the same is not that of things, is not real but rather is intelligible, and if one rebels against the notion of a purely intelligible resistance, then in all these cases one will follow Levinas no further.[5]

To put it more simply, Derrida thinks that any attempt to think of the alterity of nature contradicts the presuppositions of Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*, and that one should leave this terrain to be able to think of it. In fact, he assumes that because the face of things does not induce reciprocity, there cannot be alterity for Levinas. He assumes that the absolute alterity is linked with the human face exchanging its glance:

> The face is not only a visage which may be the surface of things or animal facies, aspect, or species. It is not only, following the origin of the word,

2 Edward F. Mooney and Lyman F. Mower, "Witness to the Face of a River: Thinking with Levinas and Thoreau," in *Facing Nature: Lévinas and Environmental Thought*, pp. 279–299.

3 Peter Atterton, "Facing Animals," in *Facing Nature: Lévinas and Environmental Thought*, pp. 25–39.

4 Jacques Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis*, Paris: Galilée 2006, pp. 146–162.

5 Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass, London and New York: Taylor & Francis Group 2005, p. 117. My italics.

> what is *seen*, seen because it is naked. It is also that which sees. Not so much that which sees things—a theoretical relation—but that which exchanges its glance. The visage is a face only in the face-to-face.[6]

So, Derrida shows that despite the fact that Levinas denied reciprocity as an ethical foundation, he still assumes it. Derrida states that alterity in Levinas must be invisible since otherwise it would only be an illusory alterity linked to objects. Illusory alterity (alterity of nature and alterity of objects) is provisional, and it is an alterity "given only within sight of its own consummation, its own consumption."[7] Derrida also thinks that true alterity should be "most-high,"[8] in a sphere separated from the sphere of illusory alterity. True alterity should be untraceable and inaccessible, and it "does not belong to space, it is not of this world," says Derrida.[9]

Absoluteness and the privilege of visage lies in its absence of sensibility; the visage precedes "the dispersion of senses and of organs of sensibility"[10] and is of the order of presence, οὐσια. Derrida claims that the visage, its alterity, according to Levinas, is not of this world since it is intangible, inaccessible, invisible, and untouchable. The primacy of the visage means that it may be the only phenomenon that is likely to manifest its non-phenomenality. The world would then exclusively be a totality, and nothing but the visage would rip apart phenomenology.[11] Only the visage would be beyond the sensible. Totality, understood as sensibility, would not get beyond being by itself since Derrida believes that for Levinas, totality is always finite totality.[12] This brings Derrida to his assertion that, for Levinas, there is no difference or fertile infinity in totality, in the interiority of an ego. Thus, in Levinas true alterity is not spatial and space remains only in the sphere of the Same, although Derrida thinks that the word "exteriority" unmistakably refers to space.

As a consequence, in Levinas, the human does not truly belong to the world. However, it should not be forgotten that in the early works of Levinas the subject appears thanks to phenomena such as sleep, work, pain, effort.[13] In the

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6 Ibid., p. 122.
7 Ibid., p. 115.
8 Ibid., p. 115.
9 Ibid., p. 116.
10 Ibid., p. 125.
11 Ibid., p. 130: "the face rips apart the sensible."
12 Ibid., p. 149.
13 See Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academics 1988; *Time and the Other*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen, Dordrecht, Boston, Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff 1987; and Emmanuel Levinas, *Discovering*

early works of Levinas the first constitution of the subject starts in the space and this space is *other*,[14] since subjectivity emerges thanks to the position of its body in sleep, in a space that is its *other*. The subject's capacity to act emerges thanks to fatigue and the possibility to fall asleep, and thus to exit the insomniac existence of *there is*. But Derrida says illusory alterity in Levinas is a mere "'play of the same,' the 'mode of identification' of an ego whose essential moments are body, possession, home, economy, etc."[15] But he is mistaken, probably it is because he does not take into account certain aspects of the texts from Levinas' early work, in which Levinas understood human alterity (true alterity) as situated in the world. Levinas writes about a human intervention in the world and of the human appropriation of the world, but Derrida does not mention it. However, he claims that Levinas maintains a rigid boundary between the *Other* and the *Same*, as if the validity of this opposition were self-evident. Derrida admits that, according to Levinas, in the movement of illusory alterity (alterity of nature), the ego becomes the other in itself, while carrying out a movement outward. But the resistance of nature would remain simply a moment of totality and may be incorporated in interiority. According to Derrida, resistance of nature means a "concrete tautology" (that means non-formal) or even a "false heterology" (that means finite). According to Derrida, nature does not enter in relation with the *other* in Levinas' thinking, and it is negativity in the Hegelian sense.[16] Derrida emphasizes that nature is the identification of non-formal tautology in Levinas: despite the illusion of its simplicity, nature carries in itself a moment of negativity. But this is not a part of alterity, Derrida says.

Derrida misses the point that nature is not always so simply incorporated in totality in Levinas. For Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, a natural element is not solid, it is liquid and gaseous. Levinas relies on the metaphor of water in order to describe the elemental. The elemental is indeterminate, inappropriable, and uncontrollable in Levinas—it resists human apprehension. All things are situated in an environment. The environment—such as the earth, the sea, the air—are not possessable by man. According to Levinas, the environment is ungraspable at the conceptual level, but also at the sensible level, which means one cannot touch it, look at it, or taste it, because one cannot be confronted

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Existence with Husserl and Heidegger, trans. by Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1998.

14 Emmanuel Levinas, "Pouvoirs et Origine," in his *Parole et Silence*, Paris: IMEC 2009, pp. 105–151.

15 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," p. 116.

16 Ibid., p. 117: "If negativity (work, history, etc.) never has a relation to the other, if the other is not the simple negation of the same, then neither separation nor metaphysical transcendence can be conceived under the category of negativity."

with what one cannot perceive. By this Levinas means that each appropriation of nature by man takes place in an environment which is ungraspable itself. Levinas calls such an environment an elemental, and it represents a landscape or natural environment. Natural elements can be grasped, but this does not mean they are tools. Natural elements conserve a certain inherent indeterminacy, and this constitutes their resistance and their character, which does not allow us to possess them absolutely. This indeterminacy refers to the fact that the natural element has no form: "it is content without form."[17] Levinas states that the element unfolds its own dimension in which lies its depth, its secret. This depth of the natural environment cannot be measured. In the elemental "nothing ends, nothing begins."[18] We could well deduce from this that the natural environment represents for Levinas a certain infinity and a certain absolute. However, he adds further in *Totality and Infinity* that it is an element that separates us from infinity. He also says that the element stands outside the distinction between the finite and the infinite. However, first Levinas never elaborates on the possibility of the elemental representing infinity, but he does not deny this possibility (he denies this possibility only in his later work). His reflection on the infinite or the absolute in nature remains contradictory, but it is not absent as stated by Derrida. We will inquire in this text why there is such a contradiction in Levinas. Is there something that prevents Levinas from postulating true alterity or the absoluteness of nature? What is the character of the absolute in Levinas and its relationship to alterity?

In this article, we will demonstrate that the absolute in the late works of Levinas represents man created in the image of God, which prevents him from attributing the status of alterity to nature. In the late works of Levinas, we read that the only being who has alterity is man since he resembles God. This is not the case in the early works of Levinas, where one can find a reflection on nature and its alterity, even though he considered this alterity to be illusory. Then we will discuss the work of Catherine Chalier who proposes an ethics based on alterity of nature. In the last part of this article, we will show that a certain superiority of the divine and the human compared to the rest of the living beings prevents us from developing environmental ethics of alterity because the idea of the superiority of the human is at odds with the key notion of environmental philosophy—the inherent value. However, that does not mean it is impossible to have religious beliefs compatible with environmental ethics, as Arne Næss reasons.

17 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 2007, p. 131.

18 Ibid.

In the next part we will focus on the concept of the absolute in the last period of Levinas' thought and the consequences of such a reflection on the absolute. We will examine the possibility of developing environmental thought based on Chalier's philosophy.

1 The Late Works of Levinas and the Divine Absoluteness

It is certainly clear that Derrida points out the danger that lies in Levinas' way of thinking of femininity, animality and divinity. In *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Derrida associates these topics and questions with Levinas' political thinking, the consequences of which are significant. In *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, he approaches the concepts of ipseity and home, based on questions of hospitality, and his analysis of the Levinas' early works has a political aspect. His criticism is harsh, underlining notably the issue of political thought based on a Levinasian conception of hospitality, which is linked to the family hearth and the intimacy of the home, and which is characterized above all by the feminine presence. In this text Derrida describes Levinas' evolution from *Totality and Infinity* to his later writings on political questions in general. When it comes to *Totality and Infinity*, politics would be defined as "the art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means…as the very exercise of reason."[19] Thus, Levinas in his early works clearly disagrees with political institutions as such, which Derrida finds problematic for several reasons. According to Levinas, in order to commit murder, one must presuppose the ethics embodied by the face, and this makes the murderous act in itself impossible since it already presupposes the enigmatic presence of the face: "allergy, the rejection of the other, even war, appear in a space marked by the epiphany of the face."[20] Politics is, for Levinas, in his early works always equivalent to the tactics and the strategy which are at the antipodes of the pre-original and radical ethics defined as language inasmuch as it would be identical to a "positive deployment of this pacific relation with the other, without frontier or any negativity."[21] If ethics were not radical, it would not resist the sameness, and one could easily say that ethics excludes the third party which is necessarily involved in any thinking of the political. But Derrida shows that it is nothing but this absoluteness—a deification—of the ethical relationship and of the face in Levinas, that would make the link

19 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21.

20 Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1999, p. 91.

21 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 172.

between politics and ethics impossible, and we will show later that this makes it difficult to establish a firm link between ethics and nature (and politics, for example, a good environmental policy).

Derrida links all of this to Levinas' statement that the first biblical commandment "thou shalt not kill" is an ahistorical ethical event. Far from seeing in it only one of the foundations of Judaism and Christianity, Levinas proclaims its validity as constituting the root of any ethics that precedes history since it is more original than history itself. This means that Levinas identifies all ethics with the first commandment, and he asserts that there is no historical event separated from this commandment. It is universal. The political consequences of this attitude seem obvious, and Derrida insists on the fact that with Levinas it is simply God that guarantees the nudity of the human face, and that this excludes any possibility of understanding the nudity of other natural beings. Derrida deduces from this that Levinas thus rules out any possibility of an ethics relating to other types of entities, such as animals and inanimate entities. It is possible that Levinas would see in human ethics the foundation of all other ethics (even animal ethics), for ethics in general is constituted only from the biblical commandment "thou shalt not kill." So this commandment also represents a foundation for environmental ethics, according to Levinas.

Derrida observes that Levinas often translates this commandment as "Thou shalt not commit murder." The formulation presupposes homicide, the killing of man, whereas "Thou shalt not kill" could also concern "the other beings than human." Derrida notes that the Levinasian version of the commandment "doesn't forbid putting to death in general."[22] This is where the core of the problem lies: Levinas does not take into account life (and death) in general. Derrida concludes that, according to Levinas, the animal does not die; it croaks and therefore is not affected by ethics since it is not mortal. Finally, Derrida criticizes Levinas for not seeing "existence as life, as livingness [*vivance*], as is the case with Descartes' 'I think therefore I am.'"[23] According to him, Levinas takes into account only the human perspective and leaves aside the rest of the living beings. Similar to the whole Western philosophical tradition, he also considers that death is not specific to the living beings in general, but only to the human. Derrida identifies in this philosophical tradition, to which Levinas belongs, "the unthought side of a thinking of life"[24] and of death. We are going to focus here on the consequences of this Levinasian formulation of the first

22 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal Therefore I am*, trans. by David Wills, New York: Fordham University Press 2008, p. 110.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

commandment for the thinking of the alterity of nature. Why is such a formulation of the first commandment incompatible with the alterity of nature?

We can see in his early works that, despite all the useful contradictions of his thought which indicate that the *other* is nature,[25] infinity as absolute and divine alterity nevertheless remains reserved for the face in Levinas. The evolution of the problem of the divine absoluteness in Levinas can be traced up to a late stage of his work, for example, in *Beyond the Verse* (1982).[26] The text is part of the Talmudic exegeses written after *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, and my hypothesis is that, in this period, Levinas attributes alterity exclusively and definitively to the human and the divine. For the later Levinas, infinity or transcendence is related to the "irruption of man into being or the interruption of being by man or, more exactly, the interruption of the alleged correlation of man and being in ess*a*nce."[27] This is possible thanks to "the inspiration of man by God which is man's humanity. Here the 'in' of the 'excessiveness in the finite' is made possible only by the 'Here I am' of man welcoming his neighbour."[28] Levinas' position at that time: the infinite is the other man—the neighbour, the brother, the sister (the widow) who originates in divine inspiration, in the 'here I am' as interpreted by Derrida a few years later.[29] The infinite resides in the "Most-High as an ethical relation with the other,"[30] and our relationship with the infinite, with the "tout autre," has the character of obedience to desire, but not to bodily need. In this late period of Levinas' thought, the infinite is still unmistakably situated "higher than the soul."[31]

In the text entitled *In the Image of God' according to Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner*,[32] Levinas describes the Kabbalah-inspired cosmological system of master

25 See the text "Humainism," in which I argue that Levinas develops the thought of the alterity of nature. "Humainism," in *Homme nouveau, homme ancien. Autour des figures émergentes et disparaissantes de l'humain*, ed. Katalin Bartha-Kovács, Róbert Karul, Andrea Tureková, Szeged: JatePress 2019. This problematic was also a key subject for my doctoral thesis *Le problème philosophique de la conceptualité de l'insaisissable*, Bratislava, Paris: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Komenského, Filozofický ústav SAV, Université Paris 8. École doctorale No. 31. Pratique et théories de sens 2021. The present article is a part of my thesis.

26 Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, trans. by Gary D. Mole, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1994.

27 Ibid., p. 147.

28 Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, p. 148.

29 See Jacques Derrida, "En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici," in his *Psyché. Inventions de l'autre,* Paris: Galilée 1987, p. 159.

30 Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, p. 148.

31 Ibid., p. 149.

32 Levinas, "In the Image of God' according to Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner," in *Beyond the Verse,* pp. 151–168.

Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner of Vilna in Lithuania. This master was unknown in Paris, and Levinas introduced him to the Parisian Jewish community as the master of a yeshivah school destined to free Eastern Judaism from the influence of Western philosophy. In this text, man as the *other* represents divine transcendence, the opposite of which is reason. The word "Same" is in this text synonymous with rational theology. Levinas does not hesitate to declare that only rational theology can lead us "towards the 'death' of God and the end of the humanism, or the humanity, of man."[33] He considers that Volozhiner's thought could protect the originality of Eastern Judaism (Russian, Polish and Lithuanian) from the rationalism of the West and the Enlightenment. Levinas describes the cosmology and metaphysics proposed by this master, exposing in particular the hierarchical system involved. According to him, the definition of man proposed by Volozhiner is not based on the rational animality as suggested by the Greeks, but it is forged from the biblical notion of man created in the image of God (and divinity is the synonym of the power to create and master all the forces of the worlds). There is a resemblance to God in the depth of interiority, in the secret of this interiority. In this hierarchical system, the high represents life, and the soul represents the interiority of the low. Levinas recalls that this hierarchical system comes from the Kabbalah, but he notes that it remains in conformity with the Hellenic model. He suggests that interiority should be thought thoroughly because man occupies an exceptional place and man is not a simple stage in the hierarchy. According to Volozhiner, man has the power to relate to all levels of reality and everything depends on him. Not only does the soul as interiority maintain a privileged relationship with the divinity, but also God depends on the soul of man: "The presence of God to the world, in the form of its soul, and in the light of this, the coherence of the whole system and the presence of the soul to each world, all depends on man…man is the soul of the world like *Elohim* himself."[34] Man is the soul of the universe, and even though he is hierarchically lower than God, he is His extension. In this regard, Levinas remarks that "height and interiority coincide."[35]

Thus, man coincides with God and shares with him a privileged position. The relationship between God and man is distinguished by a special intimacy. Eventually, we can observe that in Volozhiner's cosmology, man's relationship with divinity is not a simple difference. Consequently, everything is decided in the interiority made in the image of God. Interiority can exercise the divine spirit because it is able to act effectively in its heights: "the system

33 Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, p. 148.
34 Ibid., p. 159.
35 Ibid., p. 157.

of the *mitzvot* acquires a cosmic import and, in its universality, confirms its ethical significance: to practice the commandments is to endure the being of the world."[36] Levinas' conclusion is that in Volozhiner the human is the one through whom God manifests his meaning. He completes his analysis with the following thesis: man "would signify a new image of the Absolute."[37] At the same time, Levinas points out that there is no room for narcissism—as soon as one thinks that man is responsible for another man, the concept of the self is essentially non-narcissistic for him.[38] But if we associate man with divine intimacy and say that he represents the Absolute, then is it not the paroxysm of narcissism and nationalism when man dares to state that God obeys him while being man's subordinate since he exercises *Mitzvoth*? Certainly, it is.

As already mentioned, in some writings, for example in *Beyond the Verse*, Levinas understands the *other* as uniquely human, and every attempt to conceive of alterity other than human is seen by him as the end of man, that is, the end of humanity and consequently the end of humanism. Levinas takes this position from 1972 when he expresses his fear in *Humanism of the Other Man* that subjectivity would be in danger if it were devoid of human features,[39] and it could thus create anti-humanism and therefore the end of humanism. Levinas refers here to structuralism and to the notion of "dissolution of the subject," representing the "ends of man," which we find in Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan or even Michel Foucault. The concept of the dissolution of the subject implies for the Levinas of the 1980's a reduction in the importance of subjectivity.[40] In *Humanism of the Other Man*, Levinas insists on the need to understand subjectivity based exclusively on the *other man*. In this sense, he

36 Ibid., p. 161.

37 Ibid., p. 167.

38 See ibid., p. 161.

39 It should be said, however, that even in the book *Humanism of the Other Man*, one can find sentences in which Levinas does not forget alterity of the world, even if only indirectly: "Nor must it be conceived as a technology which through the celebrated negativity reduces a foreign world into a world whose alterity is converted into my idea." Emmanuel Levinas, "Humanism of the Other Man", in *Collected Philosophical Papers,* trans. by Alphonso Lingis, ed. by Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff 1987, p. 91.

40 Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 129: "It would be enough to show the purely operational and provisional role of man in the unfolding and manifestation of a set of terms that form a system. Beyond 'objectivity,' possibly 'ideological,' an order would manifest itself in which subjectivity would no longer be anything but the detour that, in pursuance of an order, the manifestation or intelligibility or truth of this order would take. It is not man, having some vocation proper to him, that would invent or search or possess truth; it is truth that raises up and holds man (without holding on to him). Man appears as the route the structures of a formal or logico-mathematical type take to be ordered and be set in place according to their ideal architecture."

attacks Martin Heidegger's philosophy, which, according to him, aspires to an objectivity of thought of being, purified of all human traces. Levinas denounces the impossibility of this ambition:

> Even if the existence of man, his being-there, consisted in existing in view of this very existence, it is to the guardianship or the illumination, or the occultation or the forgetting, of being which is not a being that this existence is devoted—all these movements and turns raise up and situate the human. Subjectivity would appear in view of its own disappearance, a moment necessary for the manifestation of the structure of being, the Idea.[41]

The threat lies in the possibility of the return of a philosophy which would reify man instead of granting him the highest dignity: "To this nonhuman order the name matter—which is anonymousness itself—belongs."[42] For the late Levinas, the problem would be this conception of man—and therefore of humanity—based on the anonymity of nature or even of matter. At the time, Levinas thought subjectivity should be saved at all costs: the subject is "undeclinable" insofar as it is prior to the condition of nature.[43] But this project to save subjectivity occurs despite subjectivity itself, and it would be a matter of rescuing a paradoxical subjectivity, a subjectivity preceding the Ego. The fragility of the subject is no longer seen by Levinas as the fragility of existing in the face of the elements. He considers the subject as a pre-original subject and prior to himself. The subject is "outside being, *in itself*."[44] Levinas sees here man as a responsibility in which the Ego is brought back to the Self, which is necessary in his opinion in order to erase egoism and introduce meaning into being. This subjectivity is linked to an ineffable and unspeakable pre-original responsibility. Levinas calls this unspeakable *Saying*. This is undoubtedly a reference to the impossibility of naming God, at the origin of subjectivity. In the book *Humanism of the Other Man*, we understand that Levinas considers that the task of philosophy is to translate, while betraying what is divine—pure and indescribable divinity.[45] We can also observe that Levinas' vocabulary changes, and his description of subjectivity is no longer that of a subjectivity threatened by the alterity of the world as is the case in his early work, but rather of a subjectivity gathered around itself, brought back to itself—we can ask if it is

41 Ibid., pp. 129–130.
42 Ibid., p. 130.
43 Ibid., p. 135.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., p. 148.

thanks to God? Subjectivity in this sense then becomes for the late Levinas the foundation of humanism, and although it is characterized by its passivity and its exposure to the *other*, this *other* can no longer be situated in nature. A man is always facing the other man in the late works of Levinas.

The late Levinas clearly announces his objective of reaching a supreme being, which is God, the truly *Other*, and the priority attributed to man would be made possible by his resemblance to God. We thus share the same fear with Derrida, namely, the risk that Levinasian thought will convert into anthropocentrism. One finds in Levinas some tension, indeed. One can wonder if the postulation of absolute alterity (which takes the form of the divine) really excludes the alterity of nature. Catherine Chalier suggests a solution where she postulates the divine absoluteness and otherness of nature at the same time. We will examine this possibility in the following section.

2 The Alliance with God: Protection of Nature

Catherine Chalier is the author of several books, including *Figures du féminin: lecture d'Emmanuel Levinas*,[46] *Levinas, l'utopie de l'humain*,[47] and *La Trace de l'infini: Emmanuel Levinas et la source hébraïque*.[48] She is a Jewish-oriented philosopher of alterity, and she develops a conception of the alterity of nature which she introduced in her book *L'alliance avec la nature*. The book sets up a controversy around the interpretation, according to which the Jewish tradition would exclude every alterity from the world. Because, according to this interpretation, the world must be faceless and can only be anonymous, the world cannot therefore have any alterity. This interpretation is proposed by Françis Guibal,[49] who quotes Levinas in the foreword to his work *...et combien de dieux nouveaux. E. Levinas*, according to which the alterity of nature means "the eternal seductiveness of paganism, beyond the infantilism of idolatry, which long ago was surpassed. The Sacred filtering into the world—Judaism is perhaps no

46 Catherine Chalier, *Figures du féminin: lecture d'Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris: des femmes 2007.

47 Catherine Chalier, *Levinas, l'utopie de l'humain*, Paris: Albin Michel 1993.

48 Catherine Chalier, *La Trace de l'infini: Emmanuel Levinas et la source hébraïque*, Paris: Cerf 2002.

49 See his following works: Françis Guibal, *Emmanuel Levinas ou les intrigues du sens*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France 2005, *Approches d'Emmanuel Levinas: l'inspiration d'une écriture*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France 2005, *...et combien de dieux nouveaux. E. Levinas*, Paris: Aubier Montaigne 1980.

more than the negation of all that."[50] According to Guibal this sentence reveals that it is problematic for Levinas to be fascinated by "the disturbing divinities of an all too natural Place and Earth."[51] Thus, the alterity would exclude all the possibility of natural alterity, and the only possibility of justice which would condition the truth would be given in "the unsurpassable revelation of the Infinite in whose trace the neighbour stands."[52] In his point of view, Levinas, as a thinker in the Judaic tradition, is "strongly allergic to the possibility of a transcendence of the anonymous faceless divine which would have the flavour of a Greco-pagan letting-be."[53] To contradict this, Chalier already announces in the preface of *L'alliance avec la nature* a project of "awakening to *Other*,"[54] which "ties together human interiority and the exteriority of the cosmos and nature in an alliance of which no concept exhausts meaning because it refers to the Infinite."[55]

In Jewish tradition and in the Torah on which Chalier relies in her interpretation of world, nature is a book given to us by God, and which we must decipher like an enigma. Nature speaks of God by proclaiming itself "the work of His hands."[56] It bears his imprint. But even if the world signifies God, this God remains invisible, and the observation of nature is not carried out for itself, but it serves man to rise beyond the sensible experience, that is to say beyond the sensible nature, to go towards God who is this *Other* and the supreme Alterity. Man is the one responsible in the "community of destiny,"[57] which forms an alliance of man with nature. However, when man is in too much pain, he does not read the book-nature God has given to him to be responsible for it. The suffering soul can, however, find consolation in the desert which signifies an "openness to *Other* that no concept grasps,"[58] and which, in Edmond Jabès' words, gives "an eternal openness."[59]

Chalier compares this experience with the desert to a disinterestedness or to the sublime (in Kant), which would escape the grasp of the human hand, and which would anticipate the new messianic time, because the messianic world

50 Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, trans. by Seán Hand, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press 1990, p. 232.
51 Françis Guibal, *... et combien de dieux nouveaux. E. Levinas*, p. 8.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Catherine Chalier, *L'alliance avec la nature*, Paris: La Nuit surveillée 1989, p. 12.
55 Ibid., p. 13.
56 Psalm 19:1.
57 Chalier, *L'alliance avec la nature*, p. 26.
58 Ibid.
59 Edmond Jabès, quoted by Catherine Chalier, *L'alliance avec la nature*, p. 26.

will be a world without image and without possible comparison between the image and its representation.[60] The alterity of nature then takes on a messianic meaning here, and it is equivalent to the promise that would be fulfilled if man knew how to hold back. The divine word

> would educate man by ordering him to restrain the gesture of his hand ready to create an idol and to attribute the divine to it... And it is precisely this restraint of gesture, but also of the gaze and what corresponds to them on an intellectual level, this reserve of intelligence which does not hasten to understand, which would open onto the sublime.[61]

The alterity of nature, conceived by Chalier as disinterestedness, should not be confused with banality since it is equivalent to the immeasurability of the sensible, which has already erased itself in its appearance.[62] Nature as a 'colossal' thing, following the example of God, should therefore not be taken hold of by man since the experience of the alterity of nature is, for Chalier, equivalent to the renunciation of idols which claim to represent the shimmering divinity through nature. The alterity of nature is not the sensible experience of nature here. The experience of the alterity of nature, thus understood, then corresponds, according to Chalier, to an elevation beyond the sensible towards the infinite, which is not in the sensible, but in a separate layer of the sensible. Nature is ungraspable to man. It is the work of God as Abraham's prayer says: "I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars."[63] Nature should then be ungraspable to man, but it is created by the divine hand. We can conclude that, for Chalier, nature is perfectly accessible to God, even if it remains inaccessible to man.

Nature is traversed by a voice that speaks words to which we humans should listen. It is the divine voice. The sense that allows us to observe and read nature is hearing because nature narrates without the language coming out through the lips. The privilege of hearing is evident in the Jewish tradition: it is the image of the Jewish people refusing to look directly into the eyes of the divine (the eyes of nature). We can recall Moses who covers his face before God at Mount Horeb and prefers to take shelter in the hollow of a rock to contemplate

60 See Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Messianism*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy 1974, p. 65. quoted by Chalier, *L'alliance avec la nature*, p. 26.

61 Chalier, *L'alliance avec la nature*, p. 28.

62 Levinas quoted by Chalier, *L'alliance avec la nature*, p. 29. Levinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Paris: Vrin 1967, p. 200.

63 Psalm 8:3.

the back of God.[64] According to some interpreters of the Torah, the presence of God is revealed in a hollow that shelters the world. He turns his back because God never gives himself fully; he represents an abyss.

It is a problem of place: the question is whether God is the place of the world or whether the world is a place of God. The answer is clear: God is the place of the world, but the world is not his place. This implies that no place exists without God, who never gives himself entirely in the place that the world is. God surpasses the world and also resides outside the world. To put it another way, God is present everywhere in the world, and the world is whole within him, but God goes beyond the world. God can be situated beyond the world, but the world cannot be situated beyond God. Even if God gives himself as immanence, He appears in the world only as a divine trace or in an abyss, He cannot offer himself as finite because He would diminish himself by this act. For the immanence of the world is not the proper mode of relation to the infinity that God is. Furthermore, nature is not its own cause; it is God who is its cause. Nature has no eternal existence while God is eternal. The world, like nature, is a finite place and thus cannot be the proper place of the infinite God. It is the other way round: the infinite must be the place of the finite. As we tried to outline above, according to Chalier, man's position is the one of a mediator between the world (nature) and God, between the finite and the infinite. Man can work for the reconciliation of the transcendent and the immanent, of God and the world. This reconciliation is tantamount to an alliance between the world and God. God calls man to work on this alliance through a concrete act that would allow matter to spiritualize itself. This is exactly where the responsibility of man towards nature lies. Only man can "unleash the light of holiness that nature harbours or hides"[65] because the world and nature contain a possibility of holiness. Otherwise, nature would remain violent (animals would kill each other, trees would fight for every ray of light); nature must be saved to eliminate this violence between animals. It is a question of elevating nature, to which the messianic promise also applies. But—and Chalier is paraphrasing Moses ben Jacob Cordovero here—the time of messianic redemption will bring to each being liberation commensurate with his expectation, and only those who understand the Torah will be freed from impurity, death and anxiety.[66] Animals and those who do not know the Torah cannot be liberated in this way.

64 Exodus 33:21.
65 Chalier, *L'alliance avec la nature*, p. 92.
66 Ibid., p. 191.

Chalier also confronts the difference between man and animal by criticizing the waste of animal meat. She holds to the prescription of the Torah concerning the consumption of red meat by explaining it through the distinction between different souls. The animal has a living soul (*nefesh haya*) but only man has a spiritual soul (*neshama*), and therefore a soul superior to that of the animal. Man finds himself in an assuredly superior position, not only because he is responsible for the alliance between God and nature, but also because he possesses all types of soul and shares with the animal the power of the living soul. The living soul is the soul that circulates in the blood of the beast, and which must not be consumed by man because blood is life, and man should not absorb life with the flesh.[67] Even though it is not acceptable for humans to consume the blood of animals, it is quite justifiable to shed the blood of animals to sacrifice them to God—in this act of sacrifice the animal belongs no longer to man, but to God. The sacrificed animal symbolizes the man who sacrifices himself through the animal offering. This sacrifice is justified by Torah. During the Flood, almost all animals were sacrificed by God because of the evil of man, except those that Noah had chosen. The story of Noah is, in Chalier's eyes, proof of man's ability to ensure an alliance between nature and God,[68] for Noah, who was the only righteous man, had been able to save a couple of each animal and with them, nature as such. Chalier's answer is clear as to whether the animal has a face: animals do not have faces, and she relies here on Levinas and the Torah: "However, taking a human face for an animal figure, confusing it for example with a grasshopper... often leads to irreparable acts—such as that of Cain—and the loss of one's own humanity."[69] To think otherwise is a perversion; animals have no human responsibility because they cannot hear the divine voice according to Chalier. Moreover, animals are not made in the divine image like man. The lack of distinction between animal and human would, in her view, cause disorientation. To say that an animal has a face would imply the possibility of the murder of man. Chalier also seems to be critical of the idea of animals having rights and regards it as a perversion. On the other hand, Levinas' answer to the question about the snake's face, which dates from 1986, shows that the subject is very complex and not clear for him: "I cannot

67 Deuteronomy 12:23.

68 In this context we can be reminded of Derrida's interpretation of the story of Noah and the alliance, which Derrida offers in *The Gift of Death*: Noah is the one who is more just than Yahweh, who wants to eliminate all traces of life on earth, and who regrets having made man on earth. This Derridian reading reverses the act of grace by asking: who gives thanks to whom? God to Noah? Noah to God? See Jacques Derrida, *Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2017, pp. 146–151.

69 Chalier, *L'alliance avec la nature*, p. 122.

say at what moment you have the right to be called 'face'. The human face is completely different, and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal. I do not know if a snake has a face. I can't answer this question. A more specific analysis is needed."[70] Then he says: "The phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form in the dog."[71]

3 Conclusion

Chalier places Levinas into opposition to Heidegger. That is to say that according to Heidegger nature is an unreadiness-at-hand (nature does not belong to man as a means), and that nature is a trace of God which means beyond being. But she says at the same time that human excellence stems from the unique faculty of man to orient himself towards the Other (God) who never returns to the same. In other words, his ability to save nature is established by an alliance between man and God. Man's privilege also comes from the fact that he alone was created in the image of God. Man most resembles God and other beings are only his traces. For Chalier, this privilege has an impact on the relationship of man to animals and plants, as well as to inanimate objects, which results in the possibility of animal sacrifice that Chalier assumes perfectly. According to her, man's privilege is also constituted by the fact that man is the only one who can hear the voice of nature, through which God speaks to him and through which his holiness shines. The only one capable of reading in the book of nature is man. He is thus the only one responsible, because no animal can hear the voice of the divinity which penetrates nature since it has no face. According to Chalier, the humanity of man is supernatural in this sense because it is the spiritual. Man can thus love nature only in order to become supernatural himself and to get closer to God, for if he loved nature for itself without going beyond it—which means going towards God—he would "worship" nature, as is the case with Heidegger. Such worship would be, as she says while mentioning the 12th century Jewish philosopher Maimonides, a degeneration, which would consist "in venerating the forces of nature and the stars…while forgetting the Creator."[72]

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70 Emmanuel Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emanuel Levinas," in *The Provocation of Levinas*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, London, New York: Routledge 2003, p. 172.

71 Ibid., p. 169. But Levinas also says that Bobby the dog was the last Kantian in the world during World War II. See Levinas, "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights," in *Difficult Freedom*, p. 202.

72 Chalier, *L'alliance avec la nature*, p. 39.

Chalier's most problematic notion is that of the alliance between man and God. This concept only justifies the privilege of man which would follow from the divine privilege over nature. Even if she claims a certain alterity in nature, and she affirms that this idea is present in Levinas, this alterity is created by the hand of God, who caresses man charitably by entrusting all of nature to him under a contract. Chalier suggests that man is supposed to save nature like Noah and protect it. Animals come only after man, and man comes after God. This results in the justification of the death of animals (sacrifice), the impossibility of redemption for animals (they cannot read the Torah), the impossibility of saying that animals have a face (without becoming like Cain, says Chalier). According to Chalier, nature is not its own cause because its cause can only be God. The superiority of God also consists in the omnipresence of God in nature, while nature does not reside in him. In this sense nature is rigidly separated from God. God is located above and nature below. Chalier goes so far as to say that animals would kill each other if there were no man to protect them. The problem with this vision consists in the attempt to say that absolute alterity is represented by the *other man*, that is, by man who receives his absoluteness from God. Chalier openly postulates the alterity of nature, but she also thinks that it is inferior and dependent on absolute alterity. We can conclude that Chalier does not think that nature has an inherent value.

Coming back to late Levinas, one might ask: How can the absolute and the privilege of the face be summarized in the late Levinas? The area of absolute alterity is supposed to be separated from the area of the same and illusory alterity. The separation would preserve the purity of the first. Levinas considers that absolute alterity should not be mixed with illusory alterity. The realms of illusory alterity and absolute alterity are supposed to be separated in such a way that they do not even share frontiers, so that there is no correlation between interiority and *autrui*. The alterity of *autrui* would not even be a negation of interiority since denying interiority already means reacting to it. The alterity of *autrui* or of God should not even react to the illusory alterity, from which it is supposed to be infinitely separated. The alterity of *autrui* should not be considered as a reaction to interiority since *autrui* is in no way conditioned by interiority but, on the contrary, is absolutely independent of it. However, absolute alterity is not linked to the property of the subject, but rather it is the expropriation of the subject *par excellence*. But, from the point of view of the last period of Levinas' thought, the absolute alterity of *autrui* is in a superior position to that of the illusory alterity of nature; its position is derived from the divine because only man was created in the image of God. *Autrui* should be positioned above any perceived reality (nature represents what can be perceived), as if man would thus be God on earth, a god who masters even

divinity, as Levinas suggests in his interpretation of Volozhiner's cosmology. Absolute alterity would be at the origin of everything, dominating interiority (where nature is located) and being the foundation of all meaning. The late Levinas also asserts clearly that absolute alterity precedes the illusory alterity of interiority.

The fact that the alterity of the face is absolute means that the human face dominates and is purified from nature. This implies that it cannot create fusion with the non-absolute, with nature. The face is not contaminated by the concept, nor by the image, nor by being, nor by the sensible. The demonstration of the phenomenon of the face is purely absolute: "No fear, no trembling could alter the straightforwardness of this relationship, which preserves the discontinuity of relationship, resists fusion, and where the response does not evade the question."[73] The face is absolutely separated from the world that could destroy its radical alterity. The face is invisible, untouchable, inaudible, untastable. It does not have any taste. This is true in Levinas' late work. But Levinas distinguishes between the sphere of the Same and the sphere of the Other in *Totality and Infinity* as well (in the first period of his work). These two spheres should be separated: the illusory alterity of nature takes place in the sphere of the Same, of interiority (i.e., the relationship of interiority to the world and to itself). The absolute alterity takes place in the sphere of *Other*, which is the sphere of *Autrui* (the other person).

The late Levinas resorts to the absolute, and it is precisely by doing so that he can establish a hierarchy between the living, just like Chalier. And because they postulate an absolute alterity of the human derived from divine alterity, they do not recognize the inherent value (or 'inherent worth') of nature. The concept of the inherent value of nature is a concept used in environmental philosophy, and it can be found in J. Baird Callicott and in Arne Næss.[74] Inherent value means the independence of man's nature or its usefulness to man, and this constitutes the essential feature of nature. If inherent value is attributed to nature, it is valued as an end in itself. So the evaluation of its value cannot be made by man from its beauty, usefulness, commercial value, religious value, etc., or from any evaluation by man.[75] Consequently, nature cannot be an inferior trace of God, which has been entrusted to man as Chalier and the late Levinas suggest. An ecological thought based on a conception of the

73 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 203.

74 John Baird Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethics*, New York: Sunny Press 1999, pp. 251–261. Arne Næss, *Ecology of Wisdom*, Berkeley: Counterpoint 2008, p. 111.

75 See Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2011, pp. 72–77.

unlimited capacities of subjects and their mastery of other entities (in the sense of guardianship or of the alliance with God) is not tenable. Such thinking does not really count with the alterity of nature and remains based on the idea that humans are the absolute masters of the universe (the allies of God). Callicott says:

> For if no intrinsic value can be attributed to nature, then environmental ethics is nothing distinct. If nature, that is, lacks intrinsic value, then environmental ethics is but a particular application of human-to-human ethics.…Or, putting the same point yet another way, if nature lacks intrinsic value, then *nonanthropocentric* environmental ethics is ruled out.[76]

So Callicott argues that environmental ethics are not possible without recognition of the inherent value of nature. Arne Næss defines inherent value in the first two principles of Deep Ecology:

1. The flourishing of human and nonhuman life on earth has inherent value. The value of nonhuman life-forms is independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life-forms are also values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and nonhuman life on earth.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.[77]

Næss defines Deep Ecology as compatible with any religious belief or with any philosophy, on the condition that the belief does not contradict these three principles which lay the foundation of the inherent value of nature. Næss assumes that adherents of Deep Ecology come from different cultures, and his goal is not to formulate one theory for all but rather to formulate a *common platform* from various religions and philosophies. The *common platform* has four levels (see the Apron Diagram).[78] The idea is that we can assume Deep Ecology theories from several hypotheses and assumptions at level 1. The principles of Deep Ecology, the first three of which we mentioned above, are at level 2. Normative assumptions and particular rules, decisions and actions are at levels 3 and 4. Næss mentions Buddhism, Christianity and 'Ecosophy' among the religions, within which the assumptions of level 1 are formulated. But at the same time Næss, of course, emphasizes the need for agreement at level 2, and the first assumption concerns inherent value. So it is not a question of

76 John Baird Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethics*, New York: Sunny Press 1999, pp. 241–242.
77 Arne Næss, *Ecology of Wisdom*, Berkeley: Counterpoint 2008, p. 111.
78 See ibid., p. 107.

saying that one must be atheist to affirm the values of environmental philosophy since environmental philosophy does not exclude the existence of God, as Næss demonstrates. But a concept of the absolute which implies a hierarchy between the living excludes it.

This critique opens up a space for the alterity of nature instead of seeking absolute alterity. The alterity of the world is neither deceptive nor illusory if we give up the absolute. The renunciation of the absoluteness of alterity then opens up a new dimension of alterity, the alterity of nature no longer has an inferior status. That is why it is important not to reserve ethics for the face because if we neglect other alterities, we can cause the death of "many faces." There are also victims of ecological catastrophes,[79] which are the result of forgetting the alterity of non-humans, which ultimately causes the destruction of humans. However, it is not because neglecting the alterity of non-humans causes the destruction of humans that we should think about the alterity of non-humans. One should not think of extra-human alterity only because it is necessary to preserve human alterity. Indeed, that would be tantamount to forgetting the alterity of non-humans and thinking of it exclusively from the selfish point of view of humans, but selfishness is unacceptable for any ethics of alterity such as Levinas thinks of it. On the contrary, thinking about alterity means trying to forget one's own identity and not perceiving oneself as absolute forces of the universe (derived from the divine). Anyway, ignorance of non-human alterity is not the fundamental reason for this destruction of humans by the environment. This ignorance is only a consequence of belief in the absolute. The reason is the hierarchy of entities in the world, which is derived from the absolute. The hierarchy of entities in the world is based on the absoluteness of the understanding and perceiving; it is believed that this grasp (of divine origin) can guarantee the reasonable order of the world. It is also believed that this movement can be absolute, and it is God who is the guarantor of the absolute grasp. God is supposed to see and to understand absolutely everything. This ability to understand is often perceived by humans as a gift from God, a gift from the absolute. In Judeo-Christianity, man is made in the image of God, and he makes an alliance with God, which makes him the master or guardian of the world. The hierarchy is thus based on a certain idea of the absolute, from which the rest of the world is derived. But these are only narcissistic excuses, by which the human wants to ensure a superior position

79 See Karn Vohra, Alina Vodonos, Joel Schwartz, Eloise A. Marais, Melissa P. Sulprizio, Loretta J. Mickley, "Global Mortality from Outdoor Fine Particle Pollution Generated by Fossil Fuel Combustion: Results from GEOS-Chem," *Environmental Research*, vol. 195, April 2021, pp. 2–8.

in nature. The human community sees itself in a very narcissistic way at the top of this hierarchy. Humans are supposed to be the most "reasonable" and the most powerful, and we just have to convince ourselves of our invincibility. However, knowing if we are really the most powerful may not be important because it is not essential to define "our human identity" or "our" difference with other entities. The question concerning the difference between humans and the others and investigations into the capacity of animals to think resemble an endless competition, in which we relate to the *other*, based on what the *other* means in comparison to us, not in itself as a being that has an inherent value.

In *Given Time*, Derrida says that one "can replace archaic society, the archaic or the original in general *by anything* (by X, or by Chi)—the father, the creator, the supreme being, the prime mover, the logos, the male or female possessor of the phallus."[80] What Derrida criticizes in this sentence is the idea of an absolute origin and the hierarchy that is derived from that origin, divine or other. For Derrida "it is nature that gives, and one must prove oneself worthy of this gift. One has to take and learn the gift of nature."[81] So nature is not just a gift from God, for which we are responsible and with which we can do what we want because we have made an agreement with God. At the end of the day, Derrida criticizes the notion of the 'gift of nature,' as if nature represented an origin to which we should return since it is something given to us by God. This is confirmed in certain parts of his work *Of Grammatology*. Nature is understood there on the basis of the nature/culture dichotomy and the idea of origin or holiness.[82] Nature is understood here as a book given to us by God for us to read. Nature can also be identified with a sublime, original and holy writing. Derrida also criticizes the idea of the original purity of nature.[83] Because if nature is a gift from God to man, it means that man can do whatever he wants with it. He is supposed to know best how to save and protect nature, but that makes nature's position inferior and leaves it without inherent value, which is an unacceptable conclusion for any non-anthropocentric environmental philosophy.

In *The Animal That Therefore I Am* Derrida seeks the roots of human privilege in the religions of the Bible (Judaism and Christianity) as well as in Greek

80 Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992, p. 66.

81 Ibid.

82 See Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, Paris: Minuit 1967, pp. 29–30.

83 Ibid., p. 290.

mythology. Derrida mentions, for example, that, according to the Torah, God commands man to dominate the animal and to give the animals names (this even predates the creation of woman), although it is also written there that man comes into the world only after the animals. The myth of Prometheus contains a similar element: man must dominate other animals through the gift of fire, but Derrida shows that he only dominates because he is naked, without means, while the other races of animals are equipped (with hair, claws, etc.) to survive. The naked man must dominate the others to survive since his equipment is not enough. Thus, Derrida tries to reverse the hierarchy by showing that in both cases, the domination of other species by man is exercised from a defect or despite a defect. Derrida concludes that the domination of man is linked rather to a defect in man. So man is not the chosen one and the only one who can save nature.

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The articles in *The Modern Experience of the Religious*, edited by Nassim Bravo and Jon Stewart, explore the many ways in which religion was impacted by the emergence of modernity, particularly after the Enlightenment, which underscored the centrality of human reason and thus called into question traditional forms of religiosity. Modernity raised several questions that are studied by the authors of this volume: What should be the role of religion in a secular or pluralistic society? How does the human being relate to God? Can institutional religion be compatible with modern values such as civil liberties, pluralism or environmentalism?

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